

Tribhuvan University

Symbolism in *Things Fall Apart*

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Letter of Approval

This thesis entitled "Symbolism in *Things Fall Apart*" is submitted to the Department of English, Ratna Rajyalaxmi Campus, by Ganesh Prasad Bhatt has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee:

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Abstract

Declaration

I hereby declare that the research paper entitled, "Symbolism in *Things Fall Apart*" own original work carried out as a Master's student at the Department of English at Ratna Rajyalaxmi Campus except to the extent that assistance from other in the thesis paper's design and conception or in presentation style, and linguistic expression are duly acknowledged

All sources used for the thesis have been fully and properly cited.

It contains no material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree at Tribhuvan University or any other education institution, except where due acknowledgement is made in the thesis.

Gajendra Bahadur Thapa

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Introduction: Symbol and Symbolism

Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* has symbols of self-identity and self-discovery of the indigenous people, Igbo. The purpose seems to be reassertion of identity against white supremacy or against long rule of colonization to the Igbo.

In this thesis, my aim is to analyze Achebe's projection of Igbo society as a symbolic protest against White missionaries or colonialists. In order to show this projected endeavor, I will draw on function of symbolism which is relevant as a tool for the analysis of the novel as Achebe's effort on reassertion of local identity for African Self-discovery. Because Achebe originates from Nigeria, a colony of Britain, some of the writing elements he uses in his novels such as language and style are influenced by that. Through analyzing those used symbol in this novel, we can figure out that motive which Achebe is reclaiming his African identity. We understand the primary focus of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* to be a response to revolt against the effects of colonialism and reclaim on his culture or his Ibo culture. An assurance and reclaiming of the African culture or his local culture and rituals equals to Achebes' writing back at the writings of European's representation of Africa in colonialist writings using such local languages, events, phrases and idioms and some local narratives as symbols. Thus, he feels an urgency to write in the diction and language of the Igbo employing locally circulated symbols.

The setting of Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart* (1958) is a small fictional village, Umuofia of Nigeria, just before the arrival of white missionaries into their land. Due to the unexpected arrival of white missionaries, the villagers do not know how to react to the sudden cultural changes that the missionaries bring with their new political structure and institutions. Hence, this thesis aims at analyzing the used

symbols for symbolic effects in the novel to protest the European colonization on Igbo culture.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, many European nations colonized Africa and other parts of the world. Nigeria was one African nation that received visitors who were on a colonizing mission. The culture of the people of Umuofia who follow Igbo culture, came under immensely threat by the advent of the Europeans. Subsequently, the rich Igbo culture and life way succumbed to European cultural influence. In the context, Achebe's primary purpose of writing the novel is that he wants to educate his readers about the value of native African culture. *Things Fall Apart* provides readers with an insight of Igbo society right before the white missionaries' invasion on their land. The invasion of the colonizing force threatens to change almost every aspect of Igbo society; from religion, traditional gender roles and relations, family structure to trade.

One of the obvious motif of the novel is encourage his fellow countrymen to take advantage of the educational system that the missionaries introduced to them so as to better their lives. He is determined to take the modern African literature to greater heights as well as to prove to the Europeans the value of the African culture. Achebe's fear of cultural colonization to the indigenous people stemmed from his fear of the role of religion mainly, Christianity. Sharma points that Achebe has strongly criticized the role for it "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). Achebe has an authority to speak directly to the Europeans because he could speak the local people and their idea to the Europeans in their language. Thus, the command over

English language makes his position much stronger to write back to the representation of the West.

Achebe records the history of Igbo; he does so by describing both the perfections and imperfections of their culture and traditions that made them different from Western cultures. For example, their beliefs in the power of ancestral gods, the sacrifice of young boys, the killing of twins and the oppression of women to name a few. In the novel, the reader is also made aware of the arrival of white missionaries in Umuofia as well as the reactions of Igbo to their arrival. Although the arrival of the missionaries had some benefits to Igbo, there were also a number of challenges that faced the future of Igbo.

The Ibos, or Igbos, are related tribes, sharing a common language, beliefs, traditions, and social structure. They inhabit a large forest inland in South-eastern Nigeria between Niger and the Cross Rivers. In the past, the Ibos were agricultural people. With the interest in education, they spread out Nigeria as teachers, traders, and professional men. They were not organized as a nation in a modern political system, but they were organized in small villages or group of villages through a system of agreements, petty squabbles, and settlements. They worshipped many gods such as *Chi*, personal God, under one great God *Chukwu*, a central God (Achebe 126).

In this study the prioritized issue is the explanation of symbols and comparison of symbolic elements within the novel. Because the African literature is characterized by the use of oral tradition; this latter contains proverbs, folktales, myths, rituals, traditions and customs, and so on.

The Nigerian critic Obi Wali declared that African writers should write in African languages not with the colonial languages because only the educated elite read it, and that the colonial languages cannot reflect the true African literature. The

Kenyan writer Ngugiwa Thiong'o agreed with, but others do not. Chinua Achebe expressed the conviction that, even though his mother tongue was Igbo, "the English language would be able to carry the weight of [his] African experience"(45). His writing is widely read across the world because of the style and the structure of the novel besides the language that contains proverbs, idioms and metaphors borrowed from African oral heritages.

Symbol as a Literary Tool

According to *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, symbolism has two definitions. The first is: "symbolism is the use of symbols to represent ideas or qualities, especially in art and literature." The reference is to the abstract ideas of human beings while the second is limited to the use in literature: "an artistic and poetic movement or style originated in France in the nineteenth century by using symbolic images and indirect allusions to express mystical ideas, emotions and states of mind (525)."

Symbol as a literary trope has gained a wide ranges of meaning as uses to achieve certain purposes and effects. In this line, critic Northrop Frye defined symbolism as a smallest unit carrying a distinct meaning which makes an overall effect. He further argues that a symbols is "one or any unit of any literary structure that can be isolated for critical attention." For Frye, symbols are independent entities capable of bearing meaning by means of some cultural associations. Such symbols can be, he argues, "a word, a phrase, or an image used with some kind of special reference ... are all symbols when they are distinguishable elements in critical analysis" (71). As Northrop Frye and Oxford Dictionary has defined symbolism as any small unit of literary structure like word, phrase, language which we can be isolated it for discussion or for critical analysis of the used symbols. Andrew Ifeanyi

Isiguzo extends the definition of symbol to the objects and artifacts of the people exercising definite culture. He further states that symbol is something such as idea, object, conventional or non-conventional that is used to represent something else. It could be abstract or not (34). By abstract symbols he means those symbols that do not "depend on their concrete material substance" (36). On the other abstract symbols are the symbols about or of abstract entities that are capable of abstracting themselves, freeing themselves; purifying themselves from their possible concrete substance the clearest examples of abstract symbols are mathematical symbols and names. The collective use of symbols or the systematic study of symbols used in literary texts has gained a wide fame in academic activity. This use and study can be taken as the study of symbolism, which Karen Bernardo defines as "An integral component of fiction because it enriches the narrative by pulling its message down to the level of our unconscious and anchoring there"(8).

Literary writers use symbols for definite purpose. And, literary critics go beneath the surface to understand, link and connect it to the social, political and cultural context of the literary text. And, the result turns out to be a knowledge of people and their way of life. The same happens in the research on Achebe. His symbols are strong tool to write back on the Europeans and cultural assentation of Igbo people.

Symbol and Symbolic tradition in Literature

Symbolist movement goes with French tradition. Symbolist as a movement refers "specifically [to] a group of French writers beginning with Charles Baudelaire and including such later poets as Arthur Rimbaud, Paul Vararie" and many others who used objects and abstract ideas to communicate human experiences (Abrams 314). Symbolism as an aesthetic movement came as a continuation of Romantic

tradition. Karen Bernardo observes that it came as a continuation of the romantic tradition which served as a catalyst in the outgrowth of the darker sides of romanticism (3). Also, it was as a reaction to realism and naturalist novelists such as Gustave Flaubert and Emile Zola's characterization, dialogue, and plot work on the surface to move the story along.

During and especially after WW I symbolist movement flourished across Europe and in the US. After WW II, writers started to exploit local and indigenous symbols instead of "religious and esoteric." Not only that, writers like Chinua Achebe wrote novels where symbols are "in their setting, their agents, and their actions as well as in the objects they refer to (Abrams 314). Achebe exploits this possibility and writes about the cultural loss of the Igbo tribe through a number of symbols and symbolic situations. On the extended possibility of symbol as a vehicle, Bernardo argues that in the narration of the fiction, symbolism was often produced through allegory. It gives a relationship between the literal event and its allegorical counterpart correspondence. Allegory is certainly the simplest way of adding more details to a theme. However, it limits the ability of understanding. Thus, those works of literature in which an element of mystery exists are the best. Likewise, those works lend themselves to variety of interpretations (3).

The next higher level to allegory can be called symbolism. At this level, there is still a form of correspondence, and yet it is not so one-to-one because allegory operates very consciously while symbolism operates unconsciously. For example, the case of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, we notice that Hamlet is fascinated with actors and acting, but the intelligent reader observes that this is because Hamlet's whole life has become unreal; he is being haunted by the ghost of his father. The latter is murdered

by Hamlet's uncle with whom his mother has married. Thus, the motif of actor is the symbol for the unreality of Hamlet's life (5).

At certain level, image and symbols taken to function in the same way. However, the difference are telling. The difference between imagery and symbolism is obvious since the purpose of imagery is not to incorporate meaning but to create the sense of real experience by stimulating the senses of the reader. Nonetheless, an image may also serve as a symbol if it has special meaning and represents another idea to the reader or to the character itself (4).

The purpose and use of symbols function slightly differently in different genre. In poetry, the symbolist movement had its beginnings in the poetry of French poet and art critic Charles Pierre Baudelaire, one of the leaders of symbolist movement. He encouraged the writers to represent their ideas, feelings, and values through symbols and allusions rather than through direct statements. Also, he was known for his evocative imagery and musical language. In fiction, most novels have two layers of meaning. The first layer is in the literal plot, and the second layer is in a symbolic layer in which images and objects represent abstract ideas and feelings. Since the beginning of the genre, novelists of the 19th century created symbolic patterns of imagery.

In this rich tradition, Chinua Achebe was deeply influenced by Conrad's novel *Heart of Darkness* and its deep symbolism of African traditions and cultures. As it is mentioned before; symbolism came as a continuation to the darker sides of romanticism. The works of Nathaniel Hawthorne explores the darker side of human nature, especially themes of guilt and efforts of reconciliation. One famous example of symbolism is his novel *The Scarlet Letter*. This novel gives a glance about the norms and behaviors of 17th century American puritan society. The main conflicts

and problems are about a female protagonist, Hester Prynne, that has born a baby out of wedlock, and she refuses to confess who the father of her baby is. As a punishment to her adultery, she wears a 'scarlet letter A' that symbolizes to her adultery. In *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald puts up a mixture between imagination and reality. According to Gatsby everything can be bought with money even love. Writing during 1920s Fitzgerald christened an era as the Jazz age. In general, Fitzgerald, in his works, depicted the hidden desperation and emptiness of the society members.

With the arrival of the Europeans into African land, the indigenous people and their practices went under massive changes. Since the colonial period, the African culture has changed. Thus, the contemporary African culture has become a mixture of the traditional elements and European features. About this mix culture Theophilus Okere opines:

"The African [people/ individual] today is a living confluence of cultural rivers, the major being rivers, on the one hand, the traditional culture with its tributaries of religion, social structure, language, values and world view, and on the other hand, the Christian Western culture (and other alien cultures including Islam) with its own tributaries" (qtd. In Ifeanyi Isiguwo 1).

The African identity is in crisis, and there is a need to give back and to preserve the authentic cultures especially those which are in practice. How? According to Deena Metzger in her book *writing for Your Life*, "Self-discovery is more than gathering information about oneself." She continues, "In the process of . . . discovering our story, we restore those parts of ourselves that have been scattered, hidden, suppressed, denied, distorted, forbidden, and we come to understand that stories heal." (76)

Since the past, the African societies have restored and preserved their identity and history through the arts by using symbols, animal symbols that represent the

nature of man, in forms of arts, myths, rituals, language, and names. In the African literature, symbolism is the main feature as N.K. Dzobo observes, "Symbols are sources of insights into African orientations to life." He continued to make the distinction between signs and symbolism in the degree of qualitative of information that they convey. Furthermore, the importance of symbolism is to show the diversity of the continent as Dzobo has said before.

Writing about half a century from the symbolist movement started in France, Chinua Achebe has developed his own unique tradition of symbolism in his novel *Things Fall Apart*. This novel is considered a model to the identity of the African literature because it characterizes with the oral traditions besides the structure and style. Moreover, it is used in nonliterary disciplines history, humanities, natural sciences, anthropology, and so on since it records the events during the colonial period besides the behaviors and way of life of the Ibo people before the colonialism. Thus, this novel can be studied from many angles, but I have chosen one angle which is symbolism that can be mixed with anthropology and semiotics. In sum, *Things Fall Apart* functions with symbolism.

Symbolism in *Things Fall Apart*

Symbolism in the African literature, that includes the oral tradition, Chinua Achebe gave a great importance to the function of names, colors, rituals, animals, spirits, gods, stories, and even such gestures and events in his novel *Things Fall Apart*. First of all, the title, which is taken from William Butler Yeats's poem *The Second Coming* (1921) because the case of Yeats's poem resembles the case of Chinua Achebe's novel, is the suitable title to his novel since the society of the Ibo people and their way of life and tradition got damaged by the end of the novel; the old Ibo society falls apart. Along the novel, Chinua Achebe used symbols that indicate the fall of the Ibo

tradition. The second is Achebe's use of language. The most noticeable criteria in his masterpiece are the use of Ibo words and phrases, proverbs, storytelling, myths and other elements of oral tradition in order to record and preserve the Ibo oral tradition. This latter contributes in giving the African literature its identity. The use of special language has another meaning.

The novel is published just before the independence of Nigeria in 1958, so it comes to destroy the colonialist culture and language. In 1920, Sir Gordon Guggisberg, Governor of the Gold Coast (present-day Ghana), declared, "One of the great mistakes of the education in the past has been this, that it has taught the African to become a European instead of remaining African. This is entirely wrong and the government recognizes it. In future, our education will aim at making an African remain an African and taking interest in his own country" (Reader 620).

However, the use of language is necessary to understand the events of Achebe's novel, especially the protagonist Okonkwo who represents the Ibo society and tradition. The use of narrative proverbs show the quality of the African Literature and to clarify that the Ibo people are wise unlike Joseph Conrad did not.

Besides the proverbs, there are nine narratives folktales, myths, and anecdotes in the novel. Those narratives are: The first narrative is the quarrel between Sky and Earth. This narrative resembles the case of Okonkwo and his son, Nwoye. Okonkwo wants his son to listen to masculine stories, but Nwoye prefers his mother stories, i.e. the personality of Okonkwo and Nwoye. The second narrative is the tortoise and the birds. This trickster tale is didactic because it shows why the shell of the tortoise is not smooth. The third narrative is the locust's myth. The locusts, here, represent the invaders, the white men. The fourth narrative is Ikemefuna's song. Ikemefuna sings this song in his mind, and this song has two directions.

One is Okonkwo, who is warned by Ogbuefi Ezeudu, the king, who is warned by his people. The second is Ikemefuna the one who is at risk not his mother. The other five narratives are the mosquito myth, the abame story, the kite myth, the snake-lizard myth, and the anecdote of the expert thieves of Umuike market. After three days of Ikemefuna's death, Okonkwo falls asleep, but he is tormented by the mosquitoes. Then, he remembers his mother's story. Okonkwo always listens to his heart that he must be strong not weak and what leads him to this thinking is his weak father, Unoka. Also, he refuses the advice of his friend Ogbuefi Ezeudu to do not intervene in killing Ikemefuna. The abame story is told by Obierika; all what happens in the Abame village. This story contains all the features of the performance and the most behaviors of the West African people.

Through this story, Uchendu, Okonkwo's uncle, recites the story of the kites to know the response of the white men when the missionary is killed. Furthermore, the function of the other two stories, the snake-lizard myth, and the anecdote of the expert thieves of Umuike market, are to enrich the style of the novel.

Moreover, there are many signs in the novel. For example, having yams is a sign of wealth, masculinity, and ability to feed the family. Also, from the signs of wealth is having wives and children.

Throughout the novel, the characters and the narrator compare Okonkwo with fire, and from his nicknames is Roaring Flame. Fire is a sign of purity and masculinity. Other symbols are ash, the *egwugwu*, and the mother of the spirits. Ash represents the emasculation, lifeless, and so on. Besides Okonkwo resembles his son, Nwoye, with ash, the court messengers are too called Ashy-Buttocks. Moreover, the *egwugwu*, the masked Umuofia elders, represents the culture and the independence of Umuofia. According to Okonkwo, the folktales that are told by the mothers to their

children symbolize femininity. The mother of the spirits is seen as a mother of the *egwugwu*. Besides all these symbols, there are other symbols which are the proverbs and such events like the killing of Ikemefuna, killing of the first white man, and so on.

Generally, the African traditional vision to life and time was cyclical because their daily life is related with the past. They believed in rebirth, reincarnation, and perpetuation of the common spirit. The present generations contact the past generations through nature, i.e. the Mother Supreme which the white man cannot bear this situation. Throughout the novel, we notice that the African conception of time is related with space. Unlike the white man vision of time is accurate and precise: year, month, week, day, and hour, the African vision of time is confused. They calculate in terms of planting seasons, harvest, the coming of locusts, rainy season and ritual ceremonies such as the Week of Peace, etc. Thus, it is difficult to give an accurate date of events during the traditional Africa or to situate the past.

Moreover, the elders are the keepers of the old African time because they are the witnesses who remember the history of their community. These facts are transmitted from generation to generation. The African people, too, believe that everything is animated by good spirits, *benedicende*, or bad spirits, *maledicende*, i.e. *potestas*, both kinds of spirits. In the novel, the most dramatic event in Africa is the coming of the white man, i.e. the European colonization. Achebe insisted on this period to understand the present and to prepare the future. Also, he is attempting to show the circular African vision of time and space, i.e. the system of *gyre*, and the linear European vision of time.

After the colonization, the pre-colonial Africa is opposed to the linear time of the white man. The main character, Okonkwo, constitutes the central point in the novel, and who represents the closed circle of society. By the coming of the white

man, the traditional mechanism of order disappears with its representative Okonkwo. He is well-known through the nine villages for his courage, but the dominance of Umuofia diminishes with the death of Okonkwo and becomes part of what is now Nigeria because the European government unifies and organizes the nine villages under one nation which is now Nigeria by bringing new systems and new economic. All these changes happen because the indigenous people were mainly inside faltering because of the injustice laws and rules of the villages. In other words, life repeats itself. After the arrival of the white man, this center damaged. So that is what happens to the Ibo society and its representative Okonkwo.

In *Things Fall Apart* there is the relation between the characters and what they represent. Achebe gives the great importance to the function of name and what the character symbolize in the novel. Even the name Umofia as a village has a meaning as Paul Brain remarks, "Umofia, the name of the community, means 'people of the forest'" (qtd. in Gane 44). So the three main characters Okonkwo, Nwoye, and Ikemefuna besides Ekwefi's sons have meanings. First of all, Okonkwo, the protagonist, is a self-made man, great wrestler, farmer, and husband who are also cruel and afraid of failure and weakness. Primarily, Okonkwo means strong and stands for strength unlike his father, Unoka, means weak and stands for weakness. He represents the Ibo society: their tradition and culture. Throughout the novel, Okonkwo is famous with the nicknames "Flaming Fire" (Achebe 108), "Living Fire" (109), and "Roaring Flame" (108). The repetitive use of 'fire' comes to assert Okonkwo's manhood and bravery which is necessary time and again to save Igbo culture from European cultural encroachment. He acquires these nicknames because of many reasons. At the beginning of the novel, Okonkwo defeats Amalinzethe Cat which gains him the first fame. He gains the nickname "the Roaring Flame" through his

achievements in early age. He becomes wealthy through working hard and sharecropping, so these two latter help him to establish his own compound and crops.

The second character is Nwoye, Okonkwo's son. He is sensible and resembles his grandfather Unoka. He leaves his father and converts to Christianity. He symbolizes wind because he quickly converts to Christianity; he goes with the wind. The reason that pushes him to convert Christianity is mainly the death of Ikemefuna. The new faith brings clarifications and proofs to the wrong orientation of the old Igbo religion. Besides Nwoye, Christianity attracts the underprivileged Osu and Efulufu-mother who have lost their twins.

The third character is the hostage Ikemefuna. He is the close friend to Nwoye and he has a great influence of him. Ikemefuna symbolizes a wilting-flower because of his tragedy in the novel. First of all, when Mbainoelders give him to Umuofia as a compensation for the murder of the Umuofian woman, he serves as a pawn by his village's elders. So he has to adopt a new life in a new village Umuofia, and leaves his village Mbaino as the wilting flower which suffers the elements of the environment. Furthermore, he suffers from his misfortune when Okonkwo kills him although his love to Ikemefuna as a sacrifice as the Oracle orders (4). Also, he represents the way of life of Umuofia people because just after his death the Umuofia village begins to destroy. Otherwise, not only the characters have a symbolic function, but also the names of the characters do such as Ekwefi's sons. She gives her sons special names in order to plead God to keep her kids alive and to break Ogbanje children's chain, Ogbanje means a child who dies and returns to his mother's womb to be reborn. Thus, Achebe has shown the importance of naming system in the Ibo society. Not only the naming system of people is important but also the naming of places and tribes as a whole does. For example, Umuofia means "the people of forest" (Gane 44).

Chinua Achebe uses Ibo words and idioms to add an African flavor to his work and in order to distinguish it from the European literature. Thus, his novel *Things Fall Apart* marked the birth of the African literature, especially the Nigerian literature or more specifically the Ibo literature. Throughout the novel, we find three categories of linguistic innovation, lexical creation: loan-words retain the Igbo meaning and form, coinages, retain the Igbo meaning but English form, and loan-blends, combines items from English and Igbo to form new meanings. Each of these elements is represented in the novel. For example, loan-words are in forms of titles, food, religion and traditional customs written in italic within the novel (57).

The most noticeable examples in the novel are: "It is an *ozodance*" (Achebe 41), here, an *ozo* is a titleholder. "He called his son, Nwoye, to sit with him in his *obi*"(44) *obi* is a loan-word meaning a house for the head of the family where he receives guests. "All the *umunna* were invited to the feast, all the descendants of Okolo, who had lived about two hundred years before"(117), *umunna* means a group of men who are related, and a loan-word of a group of women is *umuada*, " "It was the full gathering of *umuada*, in the same way as they would meet if a death occurred in the family"(93). Finally, the use of loan-words may be because they have no lexical equivalent in English (Igboanusi 59).

The second is coinages which are compound English words. These add new words to the English language. Some of those coinages that are mentioned in the novel are: "She did not marry him then because he was too poor to pay her bride-price" (Achebe 28), here, bride-price is equivalent to dowry in English. "He drank palm-wine from morning till night, and his eyes were red and fierce like the eyes of a rat when it was caught by the tail and dashed against the floor" (44), so the palm-wine

is an alcoholic drink made from the palm tree, and the most noticeable one is iron-horse which is a coinage for bicycle, "And he was riding an iron horse" (97). These words enrich the English language, and that the African novels written in English are full of them. The last one is loan-blend. As it is mentioned before that loan-blend is a combination of English and Igbo items to form a new meaning. So this is a sample from the novel, "Some kinsmen ate it with *egusi soup* and others with bitterleaf soup"(117).

Besides these three elements, there is what is called Igboism. Igboism reflects the traditional life and cultural habits (Igboanusi 63); for example, "Who will drink the dregs?"he asked. "Whoever has *a job in hand* ... "(15), here, *a job in hand* means 'a newly married man', and in Ibo language is "ijiorun'aka"(63). In sum, most of the authentic Igbo idioms are translated into English to fit the situation. Eldred Jones calls the Ibo idioms, "vernacular style" (Ndiaye 77)

In *Things Fall Apart* there are many symbolic events which draw the attentions of readers towards igboism: death of Ikemefuna, Okonkwo's crime and exile, appearance and killing of the first white man, Okonkwo's return to Umuofia village, The significance of worship many gods: Chi and Chukwu, Okonkwo's suicide etc.

The death of Ikemefuna is the first major incident of the novel which launches the rise to the climax of the novel, and this act inaugurates his own decline which automatically leads to the decline of the whole Ibo society.

[...] As the man who had cleared his throat drew up and raised his machete, Okonkwo looked away. He heard the blow. The pot fell and broke in the sand. He heard Ikemefuna cry, "My father, they have killed me!"as he ran towards

him. Dazed with fear, Okonkwo drew his machete and cut him down. He was afraid of being thought weak. (Achebe 43)

Since Ikemefuna represents the way of life of Umuofia people, his death points the beginning of Okonkwo's destruction; the destruction of the Ibo society. Although Okonkwo's love and care of Ikemefuna, he kills him. So his killing to the boy means his participation in the destruction of himself. The same thing happens to the Ibos. Though they care and love their way of life, they accept the new faith that leads to the destruction of the Ibo tradition .

Another event Okonkwo's crime and exile indicate the importance of nature to the Ibos. "Ezeudu was a great man, and so all the clan was at his funeral ... It was a warrior's funeral" ... " And then from the center of the delirious fury came a cry of agony and shouts of horror. It was as if a spell had been cast. All was silent. In the center of the crowd a boy lay in a pool of blood. It was the dead man's sixteen year-old son, who with his brothers and half-brothers had been dancing the traditional farewell to their father. Okonkwo's gun had exploded and a piece of iron had pierced the boy's heart". (Achebe 84) After the death of Ikemefuna, many flaws of Okonkwo begin to appear. His killing to Ikemefuna is not an accident; it is because of his pride. However, killing Ezeudu's son, sixteen years old, is a purely accidental event. Before the accident, we have learnt that the gun is old and rusty, "Okonkwo decided to go out hunting. He had an old rusty gun made by a clever blacksmith who had come to live in Umuofia long ago" (27). Although his crime is an accident, it is viewed as an abomination in the land. So according to the kind of the crime which is a female, he and his family have to flee his fatherland or indeed Umuofia village before the crow of the cock.

Thus, his exile for seven years means losing his titles and properties including his compound, farm, yams, etc. and rebuilding his reputation once again: His exile shows that the Ibos live in harmony and balance. If the Ibos disobey the law by allowing Okonkwo to stay, all the Ibos will be punished by the Earth Goddess *Anias* the elders said, "If one finger brought oil, it soiled the others" (87).

"During the last planting season a white man had appeared in their clan." "An albino," suggested Okonkwo. "He was not an albino. He was quite different." "The elders consulted their Oracle and it told them that the strange man would break their clan and spread destruction among them." () "And so they killed the white man and tied his iron horse to their sacred tree because it looked as if it would run away to call the man's friends ... the Oracle said. It said that other white men were on their way. They were locusts, it said, and that first man was their harbinger sent to explore the terrain (97). After the exile of Okonkwo, The first white man appears in Abame village where the elders kill him after they consult the Oracle.

The appearance of the white man in the village resembles the appearance of the locusts:

At first, a fairly small swarm came. They were harbingers sent to survey the land and then appeared on the horizon a slowly-moving mass like a boundless sheet of black cloud drifting towards Umuofia. Soon it covered half the sky, and the solid mass was now broken by tiny eyes of light like shining star-dust. It was a tremendous sight, full of power and beauty (39).

So this is a sign of invasion and change. The most dangerous thing in the invasion is when it touches the religion that is what happens to the Ibo society. Further, the white man's death gives the Europeans a chance to invade the Ibos. The white men bring all

what is new, a new religion, economy, social structure, etc. The new religion, Christianity, is seen as a 'civilizing agent' acts as a catalyst in damaging the old traditional religion of the Ibos (Killam 33). Later, the British colonizers destroy one of the main pillars of the tribe which is the chain of fathers and their sons as the case of Okonkwo and Nwoye.

Okonkwo was exiled to his motherland for seven years because he commits an abomination against the Earth goddess *Ani* by killing an innocent person accidentally. During this period, the white men build their power in the Evil Forests of Umuofia and Mbanta. After seven years, he returns to Umuofia. His return accelerates the death of the old tradition of the Ibo society. Okonkwo's return resembles the case of Snake-Lizard myth structurally and thematically (Nnaemeka 62). Why? The numerology of number seven means the dominance of the white men in both the realms Umuofia and Mbanta when Okonkwo has no political or military mandate in both realms.

This case resembles the case of Amalinzethe Cat as a champion wrestler for seven years when Okonkwo is haunted by his father's *agbala* figure, Unoka. Returning to the snake-lizard myth, after the snake-lizard kills his parent, he brings another seven baskets to cook them again, but he fails in regaining the seven baskets. So the same thing in the novel, the Mbantans fail in confronting and removing the white man out of the village. Seven years was a long time to be away from one's clan.

A man's place was not always there, waiting for him. As soon as he left, someone else rose and filled it. The clan was like a lizard; if it lost its tail it soon grew another. Okonkwo knew these things. He knew that he had lost his place among the nine masked spirits who administered justice in the clan. He had lost the chance to lead his warlike clan against the new religion, which, he was told had gained ground. He had lost the years in which he might have taken the highest titles in the clan. But

some of these things were not irreparable. He was determined that his return should be marked by his people. He would return with a flourish, and regain the seven wasted years. (Achebe 121) Okonkwo's return to Umuofia resembles the case of regaining the seven baskets. Like the snake that loses and regains her tail, Okonkwo loses his man's place that it is replaced by someone else, and to get titles he leads his clansmen to confront the new religion. Then, after three years, Okonkwo commits suicide because he realizes that the old tradition never comes back as the snake-lizard does.

When Okonkwo and his clansmen meet to find a solution to liberate the villages, one of the messengers interrupts them, He [Okonkwo] sprang to his feet as soon as he saw who it was. He confronted the head messenger, trembling with hate, unable to utter a word. The man stood his ground, his four men lined up behind him. "The white man whose power you know too well has ordered this meeting to stop," however his anger was so intense that he drew his machete "In a flash ...descended twice and the man's head lay beside his uniformed body"(144). Before the murder of the messenger, Okonkwo is thinking only to be a man and this becomes one of his flaws that lead to his decline. He swears revenge, "I will fight alone if I choose" (142).

At the beginning, Okonkwo fights the changes, and he does not believe in negotiations and that only the power can solve the problem. When Okonkwo kills the messenger court hoping that his clansmen will be behind him, he disappoints by their negative action. So he realizes that the old life never exists, and because he cannot live in a society does not resemble his old society, he decides to hang himself. His fear is to live in a society where there are no titles or privileged status that the works hard to gain his previous status. So he prefers to die than to live in a society that he is

not a member from it. His deed has another interpretation which is he wants to recreate the old masculine days of his image.

His suicide puts many critics in confusion if they consider him a hero or anti-hero. In my point of view, Okonkwo is a hero because he would be punished for his crime; he decides to kill himself than to give the chance to the white men. There is a saying to king who kills himself, "the king does not leave his palace unless he recognizes that his defense is a suicide" (Impossible love 2010). Further, T.A. Dunn considered Okonkwo as a hero as consulted with an ancient view, " he [hero] is a nobleman whose tragic end is brought about by some flaw in his character, who, in a sense, produces his own tragedy since the seeds of it are always there inside him" (40), but Abiola Irele is against that Okonkwo is a hero, i.e. anti-hero, "Okonkwo did not die as a hero – he hanged himself and shamed his kinsmen" (42). Moreover, the suicide of Okonkwo erases his status in the Ibo society and his individual defense (Irele 36).

According to what Chinua Achebe states at the end of the novel, i.e. the District Commissioner has said, "The story of this man who had killed a messenger and hanged himself would make interesting reading". One could almost write a whole chapter on him, perhaps, not a whole chapter but a reasonable paragraph at any rate. There was so much else to include, and one must be firm in cutting out details. He had already chosen the title of the book, after much thought: *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger*. (Achebe 147-8). Since Okonkwo represents the Igbo society, and for the District Commissioner Okonkwo is unimportant person, so the Ibo society as well is worthless.

In general, the Chi is responsible for the fortunes and misfortunes of the characters. The whole events that have been interpreted above summarize the relation

of the characters to the downfall of the old Ibo society. Furthermore, the use of Ibo language and tradition gives a Nigerian flavor to the novel.

Chinua Achebe is well-known throughout the world because of his masterpiece *Things Fall Apart*. Because the main features of his novel are the use of language and the oral culture of the Ibo society. Thus, in this segment the tackled issue is the use of language from proverbs, folktales, myths and the sign of such words and expressions like: yams, fire, kola, machete, and so on. Also, how these components contribute to the whole meaning of the novel because Chinua Achebe wrote his novel with this elevated style that contributed in giving the African literature its own identity.

The feature of narrative proverbs in the African literature of oral tradition contributes in giving the African literature its identity. Chinua Achebe is one of the famous Nigerian novelist and essayist who write in English. Throughout the novel *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe enriched and enhanced his style with narrative proverbs, folktales, and myths. Besides this reason, he used the Nigerian oral tradition to distinguish his work from the European literature. There are nine narrative proverbs seven folktales and myths, one historical or pseudo-historical story, and one anecdote. Those narrative proverbs are "The Cosmic Quarrel between Sky and Earth", "The Tortoise and the Birds", "Ikemefuna's Song", "The Mosquito Myth", "The Abame Story", "The Kite Myth", "The Snake-Lizard Myth", and the anecdote of "The Expert Thieves of Umuike Market". All these narrative proverbs have a relation with the overall meaning of the novel only this last narrative. The incidents of the stories resemble to what happens in the novel. Moreover, another reason is to show the life-like in that period.

First of all Ikemefuna's song this is not the whole tale. This song is about a perverse, headstrong king who eats a sacrificial roast yam to the gods, and this deed is taboo. His people sing this song to warn him from the punishment that may destroy himself, his position, and his reputation (Obiechina 3). The original one is composed of five *sala* instead of two *sala* because it is based on call and response (209).

The Second myth is that of the tortoise and the birds. All the birds were invited to a feast in the sky. Tortoise saw all these preparations and soon discovered what it all meant. Nothing that happened in the world of the animals ever escaped his notice—he was full of cunning. As soon as he heard of the great feast in the sky his throat began to itch at the very thought ... "But he had no wings," said Ezinma ... he went to the birds and asked to be allowed to go with them. The birds said, "You are full of cunning and you are ungrateful. If we allow you to come with us you will soon begin your mischief." "Tortoise had a sweet tongue, and within a short time all the birds agreed that he was a changed man, and they each gave him a feather, with which he made two wings. "There is one important thing which we must not forget," he said as they flew on their way. "When people are invited to a great feast like this, they take new names for the occasion. Our hosts in the sky will expect us to honor this age-old custom." (Achebe 68).

This trickster tale is told by Ekwefi to her daughter Ezinma. So the tale is about birds invited to a feast in the sky. When, the cunning tortoise hears about this feast, he asks to join them with giving him feathers. Because the tortoise is very clever and cunning, he asks them to change their names, so he chooses the name *all-of-you*. The name *all-of-you* symbolizes Okonkwo who represents the Ibo society. I share Obiechina's point of view that the story has a didactic meaning since it explains why the tortoise's shell is not smooth. Because of the egoism of the tortoise, he gives

his end at the end of the story. The same thing happens to Okonkwo because of his obsession in being strong that leads to his fall in *Things Fall Apart* (213). However, I and Obiechina do not share the same point of view in the following point. According to Obiechina, even Okonkwo is brave, capable, and achiever, he cannot be all-of-you. He cannot represent Umuofia village, and he cannot impose his decisions on the clan (214). For example, when he does an odd deed against Umuofia's will, he is isolated, especially his killing the court messenger while clansmen are searching for a solution to threat the colonizers. Thus at the end, he left alone which leads him to hang himself.

Each society or culture has its norms or its way of education. One of the most criteria in Chinua Achebe's masterpiece *Things Fall Apart* is the use of the African proverbs, so oral skill presented in *Things Fall Apart* by using proverbs. Achebe used proverbs in his novel to retain the culture of the Igbo language and to domesticate the English language. Besides these reasons, he used proverbs to show the complexity of the Igbo language and how they are important in their conversation as Okoye, a musician, says, "Among the Ibo the art of conversation is regarded very highly, and proverbs are the palm-oil with which words were eaten" (5). The proverb, "Mother is supreme" shows the importance of women in the Igbo land.

For example, after the exile of Okonkwo to his mother land, Aninta, Uchendu says to Okonkwo, "When a father beats his child, it seeks sympathy in its mother's hut. A man belongs to his father land when things are good and life is sweet. But when there is sorrow and bitterness he finds refuge in his mother land" (94). As it is said, "Proverbs have been an efficiently used throughout the story to depict on how respect honestly, loyalty and courtesy could affect the lives of the Igbos in good way

Furthermore, color has a symbolic meaning in the African culture and each color has its significance according to its context and situation. The most significant colors that related to their culture are red and white.

In Black Africa, women and girls paint themselves with special colors that have a meaning. In *Things Fall Apart*, when the suitor of Obierika's daughter is coming to take her, i.e. marriage, she paints her face and her body by using special colors as Chinua Achebe said, She wore a coiffure which was done up into a crest in the middle of the head. Cam wood was rubbed lightly into her skin, and all over her body were black patterns drawn with *uli*. She wore a black necklace which hung down in three coils just above her full, succulent breasts. On her arms were red and yellow bangles, and on her waist four or five rows of *jigida*, or waist beads (49). This passage contains almost all the colors. For example, red symbolizes protection as John Buchanan-Brown stated in its book *Dictionary of Symbols*, "Red dye ... with which women and girls in Black Africa paint their faces and bodies after the taboo following their first menstruation has been lifted, on the eve of their first marriage, or after the birth of their first child" (794).

In the novel, the most noticeable color is the white (the white man). He is a symbol of ghost because of the story that happened in Bantu of southern Cameroon. When the Bantus saw for the first time a white man, they called him "Nango-Kon" which means an Albino ghost (Buchanan-Brown 1106). Thus, when Obierika said, "During the last planting season, white man had appeared in their clan [Abame]," which turns out to be ominous for the whole clan of Igbo. (Achebe 97).

Achebe is like an architect in writing his novel *Things Fall Apart*. Through his use of language and the Igbo culture, he enables us to experience the previous life of the Ibo people. Thus, he gave a great importance to the first part of the novel, before

the coming of the white man, where he has used most of the symbolic items. In this part, he described the Ibo life living in harmony and balance and their functional culture in order to understand the behaviors of the protagonist Okonkwo and the Ibos as a whole. There is an intimate relationship between the items and their symbolic function and interpretation. That is; fire, yam, having wives and children, ash, the egwugu, the mother spirit, kola, twins, drums etc. some examples:

The novel is highly symbolic. Besides the main symbol the locusts, there is another symbol which is fire. Fire means purification (Buchanan-Brown 382) and masculinity. Thus, Okonkwo is symbolized by fire, and the villagers call him the "Roaring Flame" (Achebe 108) because of his masculinity. Also, when Okonkwo is disappointed by his son, Nwoye, he says, "Living fire [Okonkwo] begets cold, impotent ash [Nwoye]" (109).

Secondly, Yam is The Ibo king crop. Always in return to the novel, we notice that yam has three symbols. The first is a sign of wealth, and the most appropriate example is "He [Okonkwo] was a wealthy farmer and had two barns full of yams" (Achebe 5). The second symbol is masculinity. When Okonkwo asks Nwakibie, a wealthy man in Okonkwo's clan, to help him with yams, "I know what it is to ask a man to trust another with his yams, especially these days when young men are afraid of hard work. "I am not afraid of work (15). He continues, "I began to fend for myself at an age when most people still suck at their mothers' breast. If, you give me some yam seeds i shall not fail you" (16). Those two quotations show Okonkwo's masculinity, and Nwakibie shares me this point. Nwakibie clears his throat: "It pleases me to see a young man like you these days when our youth have gone so soft. Many young men have come to me to ask for yams but I have refused because I knew they would just dump them in the earth and leave them to be choked by weeds," he continues, "But I

can trust you. I know it as I look at you ... I shall give you twice four hundred yams". (Achebe 16) From the two symbols above, we deduce the third symbol which is the ability as a provider . If a man is wealthy, he can provide all facilities to his family from food, protection, and so on. All in all, Achebe states, "Yam stood for manliness, and he who could feed his family on yams from one harvest to another was a great man indeed" (23). This quotation summarizes the three symbols above.

Third is the same what yam symbolizes. Having wives and children are a symbol of wealth as the case of Nwakibie. Achebe said, "There was a wealthy man in Okonkwo's village that had three huge barns, nine wives [polygamous], and thirty children" (13).

Fourth, Ash is a symbol of lifelessness, impotence, and calm ("Ash" sec 5). Ash is used twice. The first is when Okonkwo resembles his son Nwoye with ash. He says, "Living fire [Okonkwo] begets cold, impotent ash [Nwoye]" (Achebe 109). The second is the nickname of the court messengers Ashy Buttocks because of their ash-colored shorts, but they are arrogant and high-handed (123).

The fifth is the egwugwu are masked dancers who impersonate the ancestors of Umuofia village and the ancestral gods. Their role is to solve the problems by judge, i.e. they serve as a court. For example, the case of Uzowulu and his wife Mgbafo. So they are a symbol of the culture, the independence, and the spirit of Umuofia . However, after the arrival of the white man, the egwugwu are replaced by the court messengers, so their symbolic culture and independence are lost.

The mother of the spirits is the deity that Umuofia village worships. She is seen as the mother to the egwugwu. Once, one of the Christian converts unmasks one of the egwugwu. This act resembles the death of god, but the mother of the spirits does not take revenge. It just weeps upon the loss of her son. The sixth myth is a form

of twin symbols of devil and curse. Thus, the Ibo people throw the twins into the bush.

For that, in the novel, the Umuofian people throw the twins in the bush, the Evil Forest; "Nwoye had heard that twins were put in earthenware pots and thrown away in the forest" (43). The recent scientific researches ensured that the cause of bringing twins in South Africa is mainly because of yams. This latter contains an acid called *negodotropine*. This means that the Ibos believe in superstitions such as the case of Ekwefi, "She hit her left foot against an outcropped root, and terror seized her. It was an ill omen (72). Also, there is another example, " When the moon rose late in the night, people said it was refusing food, as a sullen husband refuses his wife's food when they have quarreled" (74).

Finally, Drums are used in ceremonies and rituals such as in the wrestling of Okonkwowith Amalinze the Cat, "The drums beat and the flutes sang and the spectators held their breath" (3) this quotation means that the drums are symbol of culture. In addition, the drums are a symbol of psychological warfare culture and unity. As a symbol of culture is stated in *Things Fall Apart*, "Just then the distant beating of drums began to reach them. It came from the direction of the *ilo*, the village playground. Every village had its own *ilo* which was as old as the village itself and where all the great ceremonies and dances took place" (Achebe 30), and as symbol of unity and warfare (7).

Conclusion: Drawing Meaning Through symbols in *Things Fall Apart*

Symbolism is an aesthetic movement began in France in the nineteenth century. It came as a continuation of the romantic tradition and as a reaction to realism and naturalism. The symbolist movement had its beginnings in the poetry of Charles Pierre Baudelaire: *The Flowers of Evil* (1857) and *Paris Spleen* (1859). He

encouraged the writers to express and represent their ideas, feelings, and values through symbols and allusions rather than through direct statements. Moreover, there were three notable French authors whose works of poetry associated with the symbolist movement. Those authors are Stephane Mallarme, Arthur Rimbaud, and Paul Verlaine. Then, the movement spread out of France in the works of the Belgian author and playwright Maurice Maeterlinck. Through my deep analysis to the novel *Things Fall Apart* from one literary aspect which is the function of symbolism, I found that Chinua Achebe used symbolism as the main element in writing the novel for the overall meaning. Also, he gives a great importance to the first part where he has used the most symbolic items since he describes the Ibo society, before the arrival of the White Man, living in harmony and balance. Thus, his work is considered as a model of the African literature and to other English and African writers. Moreover, his work is used in non-literary fields such as history, anthropology, human science, etc. because he describes the history, culture and the tradition of the African society.

Above all, Chinua Achebe has chosen a suitable title to his novel that is borrowed from W.B. Yeats's poem *The Second Coming* (1921). So the title means that when a society accumulates injustice, that is, killing innocence, it is naturally forced to vanish. Furthermore, the most noticeable criterion of his work is the use of language from Ibo words and phrases, proverbs, storytelling, myths and other elements of oral tradition. The use of folktales and myths help in understanding the whole meaning of the novel. For example, *The Cosmic Quarrel between Sky and Earth* represents the conflict between both cultures the African culture and the European one. In addition, *The Snake-Lizard Story* that is similar to Okonkwo's exile and suicide. Hence, his use of the folktales and myths is important.

Furthermore, the use of proverbs shows the complexity of the Ibo language

because they are idiomatic expressions, and only the indigenous people can understand them. Besides the Ibo words and idioms that give an African flavor and tame the work. Also, they distinguish the work from the European literature. From above, we understand that when he said in an interview that he is a didactic writer, that is, the significance from his writing to the novel *Things Fall Apart* is to remind the Africans with their past, i.e. their culture and tradition. Another reason for writing the novel is to destroy the European culture and language and restore the old culture. Moreover, there are some events that lead to the decline of the Ibo society. Since Okonkwo represents the Ibo society, his decline means the decline of the whole society.

The main characters who have a great affect in the decline of the protagonist are the hostage, Ikemefuna, and his son, Nwoye. Okonkwo commits mistakes that lead to his downfall. First of all, he commits an abomination against the Earth goddess Ani by breaking the week peace, taking a hand in Ikemefuna's murder, and killing by mistake Ezeudu's son. This latter marks his exile, and at the same time is the arrival of the White Man.

All these incidents are the beginning of his downfall, and more specifically when he returns to Umuofia village after seven years. His return to the village accelerates the death of the old Ibo society because he cannot live in a society differs his old society. The Europeans bring with them all what is a new: a new religion, economy, customs and traditions, and social structure. Finally, the death of Okonkwo, the representative of the Ibo society, points the death of the old Ibo society.

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