

***Things Fall Apart, Power and
Krishnamurti***

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Declaration

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this assignment/thesis is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university for a degree.

Acknowledgments

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Abstract

The following mini-thesis, *Things Fall Apart, Power and Krishnamurti*, is concerned with the nature by which power is possibly viewed, maintained and transferred by the characters of Chinua Achebe's novel, *Things Fall Apart*. The intent of this analysis is to incorporate traditional literary approaches to issues of power in the novel via polarised conceptions, such as east versus west, black versus white or indigenous culture and traditions versus Christianity. Yet simultaneously, by incorporating the unique world-view of Krishnamurti, power, as possibly represented in *Things Fall Apart*, will be scrutinised as a self-perpetuating entity which chooses its own agents for its manifestation, outside and not necessarily as results of constructions of race, religion or economical design.

Specifically, I am interested in Achebe's fictional construction of the indigenous-African maintenance of power and authority within the novel; before and after the arrival of the European colonialists. Did all African villagers, as represented in the fictitious Umuofia, accept the powers-that-be with non-critical minds, or, was power and authority embedded in the processes whereby the Umuofians became accustomed and socially conditioned by the cultural constructs of their particular society? Personally, I do not perceive either of these approaches to be sufficient in the process of holistically comprehending African adaptation to and adoption of 'western' modes of culture. Instead, I believe that though the encroachment of European mercantilism and Christianity upon the African mental and physical landscape was undeniably brutal, this very brutality was in and of itself not variant, compared to psychological and physical maintenance of power in the indigenous realm. This is a primary area of concern of this thesis. I perceive that the African elite, like the European missionaries, used religion and perceptions of tradition and identity to hold on to their elitist and prestigious positions in the indigenous social network.

Secondly, this thesis is critical of the perception that the dominant emergence of western spiritual and political constructs, over indigenous structures, is a direct result of the acquiescence or absolute physical and mental defeat of African people. Rather, I perceive that African people – in the processes of becoming aware of a new way of

life and in making conscious decisions to incorporate this new world-view into their own life-scheme – altered the manipulation and maintenance of power and authority in indigenous society, within the context of *Things Fall Apart*. In effect, the transfer of political power in *Things Fall Apart* is not simply a matter of the destruction of African culture by the Europeans. Instead, it is a result of Africans becoming aware of a new way of life, and adopting aspects of this lifestyle in the place of their traditional norms.

Krishnamurti's ideas will be incorporated into the above analysis to present a particular world-view that deliberately strives to counteract the human tendency to cling to philosophies, political persuasions, theories or religious fervor. I have included Krishnamurti in the examination of the tension and psychological conversion of African people (as represented in *Things Fall Apart*) due to moments when they themselves, in the process of introspection, sought to let go of ancient customs and explore the new and foreign, as represented by Christianity. It is my position that in the moments when indigenous authority was questioned by the masses, so began a multifold process: this included the reconstruction of the African self and the re-adjustment of power relations within the African collective. Krishnamurti posed the following question:

When you are told what to do, what to think, to obey, to follow, do you know what it does to you? Your mind becomes dull, it loses its initiative, its quickness. This external, outward imposition of discipline makes the mind stupid, it makes you conform, it makes you imitate (1974:29).

I am aware that by juxtaposing the above idea next to African culture might appear blasphemous in the 'new' South Africa, given the great effort to revive 'African' culture. I do not object to this revival and consciousness of tradition and heritage. Yet, I strongly agree with Krishnamurti that the maintenance of power by a select group of elite Africans in the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial dispensations is a result of the conformity and acceptance of the masses of African people of the social, spiritual and economic constructions of the elite. The very patterns whereby Africans think was, through centuries, developed by a select group of individuals, as reflected in *Things Fall Apart*. Culture and tradition have acted as standards whereby

individuals measure the worth of their individuality. Hence, Krishnamurti views the struggle of freedom; the struggle of individuals to shake of cultural or traditional constraints, as crucial to the full development of the human self. “Freedom,” he says, “liberty, the independence to express what one thinks, to do what one wants to do, is one of the most important things in life. To be really free...within oneself, is one of the most difficult and dangerous things” (1974:30. As this thesis progresses, we will probe Krishnamurti’s claim that the individual attempt to be free, as possibly represented in Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, may be both difficult and dangerous.

Uittreksel

Die volgende mini thesis, “*Things Fall Apart, Power and Krishnamurti*” is besorg op die manier hoe mag anskou, behou en oorgedra word binne karakters van Chinua Achebe se novel, “*Things Fall Apart*”. Die doel van hierdie analise is om bewus te raak van die tradisionele literere benadering tot konsepte soos mag gesien vanuit ’n polografiese oogpunt, soos bv. oos teenoor wes, swart teenoor wit of inheemse kulture en tradisie teenoor Christenskap.

Inteendeel, deur die unieke sienswyse van Krishnamurti in te sluit, sal mag soos vervat in “*Things Fall Apart*”, in totaliteit gekritiseer word deur sy eie manifesteringe en nie noodwendig vanuit ’n oogpunt van ras, geloof of ekonomie nie.

Ek is spesifiek geïnteresseerd in Achebe se fiktionele konstruksie van die Inheemse Afrikaanse behouing van magsbeheer in hierdie novel. Beide voor en nadat Europese kolonisme hier gearriveer het, het die Afrikaner inwoners, soos voorgelou in die fiktiese “Umofia” magsbeheer in hulle gedagtes aanvaar? Of was magsbeheer onvoorwaardelik in hulle ingeplant deur die sosiale en kulturele aspekte van hul spesifieke gemeenskap. My persoonlike sienswyse is dat hierdie benadering ’n oordeelkundige benadering is om gevolglik die Afrikaner aanvaring en uitoefening van westerse kulturele modes te verstaan.

Inteendeel argumenteer ek dat die indringing van Europese merkantalisme en Christendom bo-op die Afrikaner geestelike en natuurkundige landskappe onerkenbaar gewelddadig was en dat hierdie gewelddadigheid in en vanself nie veranderlik was nie, in vergelyking met die sielkundige en fisiese behouing van mag soos voorbehou in die Inheemse koninkryk. Die elite wie die opperpriester van pre-koloniale Afrikaner gemeenskap saamgestel het, wie aangedring het op ’n vorm van getrouheid tot kulturele en politieke konstruksies soos deur hulle bepaal, het ook die psige krag van die plaaslike dorpsbewoners misbruik. Dit is my primere punt van fokus in hierdie thesis. My argument is dat die Afrikaanse elite, soos Europese sendelinge, geloof en persepsies van tradisie en identiteit gebruik het om vas te kleef aan hul eie elite en invloedryke posisies binne die Inheemse en sosiale netwerk.

Tweedens, hierdie thesis is krities van die persepsie dat die verskyning van Westerse spiriturele en politieke konstruksies oor inheemse strukture, ñ direkte gevolg was van die instemming tot absolute psise en geestelike omverwerping van Afrikaner mense. Ek sal beweer dat Afrikaner mense, in die proses van gewoon raak aan ñ nuwe lewenstyl, doelbewuste keuses gemaak het om hierdie nuwe wereld sienswyse in hul eie lewenstyl te inkorpireer. In hierdie proses is die magsbeheer soos voorbehou in die Inheemse gemeenskap gemanupileer binne die konteks van “*Things Fall Apart*”. Gevolglik, die direkte oordrag van politieke mag in “*Things Fall Apart*” was nie net eenvoudig ñ vernietiging van Afrikaner kultuur deur Europese nie. Inteendeel, dit was ñ direkte gevolg van Afrikaners wat bewus geraak het van ñ nuwe lewenstyl, en in die proses het Afrikaners hierdie lewesstyl as hul eie aanvaar.

Krishnamurti se sienswyse sal geinkorpireer word in die boostaande analise wie se wereldwyse sienswyse doelbewus stry teen die mens se geneighheid om aan te kleef aan filosofiese en politieke oortuigende gedagtes van teorie en geestelike opgewondenheid. Ek het spesifiek Krishnamurti se sienswyse ingekorpireer om die konflik en filosofiese veranderinge in Afrikaner mense te ondersoek (soos voorbehou in “*Things Fall Apart*”) as gevolg van oomblikke waarin die Afrikaners hulself introspeksie doen en in dié proses, van hul eie eeue oue tradisies en gewontes afstand gedoen het om die nuwe forum soos voorbehou deur Christenskap aan te kleef. Dit is my sienswyse dat gedurende hierdie tydperk magsbeheer bevraagteken was deur die magdom van mense. Dis hoe die rekonstruksie van die Afrikaner “Ek” en die herskedulering van magsbeheer verhoudinge binne die Afrikaner kollektief plaasgevind het.

Krishnamurti stel die volgende vraag: Wanneer ñ mens gesê word wat om te doen, wat om te dink, wat om te gehoorsaam, wat om te volg, weet jy wat dit aan n mens doen? Ñ mens se brein raak traag en die brein verloor sy inisiatief en sy fluksheid. Die uitwendige, die buitewerking van discipline maak jou brein dom, dit laat jou naaboets. (1974:29).

Ek is bewus dat deur bogenoemde idea en Afrikaner kultuur naas mekaar te stel mag as godslasterend voorkom binne die konteks van die “nuwe” Suid Afrika, gegewe die

groot inspanning om “Afrikaner” kultuur te hernu. Ek maak nie beswaar teen die heruwing en bewussyn van tradisie en erfenis nie. Ek stem saam met Krishnamurti dat deur die beheer van mag van ñ selektiewe groep van elite Afrikaners in die pre-koloniale, koloniale en post-koloniale dipensasies te gee, is as gevolg van die aanmeeming en aanvaarding deur die magdom van die Afrikaner gemeenskappe van sosiale, spirituele en ekonomiese konstruksies soos dié van dié elite. Die denks wyse waarlangs Afrikaners dink, was vir eeue lank, uitgebrei deur ñ selektiewe groep mense, soos voorgehou in “*Things Fall Apart*”. Kultuur en tradisie het ñ standard geword waarby ñ mens hom kan mee verlyk om sy waarde as individu te kan bepaal. Om hierdie rede, sien Krishnamurti die geveg vir vryheid as die geveg vir individue om kulturele en tradisionele beperkings af te skud en dis inderdaad belangrik vir die uitbreiding van die mens se eie identiteit. “Vryheid”, sê hy, “liberalisme, die onafhanklikheid om uit te spreek wat ñ mens dink, te doen wat ñ mens wil doen, is een van dié mees belangrikste dinge in die lewe. Om innerlik vry te wees... is een van die moeilikste en gevaarlikste dinge in die lewe” (1974:30). Soos hierdie thesis voortgaan, sal ek Krishnamurti se bewering dat die individu se poging om vry te wees, soos moontlik voorgestel in Achebe se ” *Things Fall Apart*” dalk beide moeilik en gevaarlik mag wees.

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Introduction

The colonial encounter between European imperialists with the indigenous patterns of living in Africa has proven to be an extremely sensitive, debate evoking period. The fact that it followed the human catastrophe of slavery, which saw the enslavement of millions of African people into the New World, and introduced an era in which almost the entire African continent became politically subjugated to European nations, makes this specific era painful and not easily accessible in discussion. As Maulana Karenga writes:

It is clear from all historical evidence that the massive European enslavement and its accompanying violence, destruction and commercial aspect was one of the most catastrophic events in the history of humankind. If one objectively calculates the costs to Africa and Africans in terms of the 50 to 100 million lives lost thru mass murder, war, the forcible transfer of populations, and the brutal rigors of the Middle Passage and of enslavement as well as the attendant dehumanisation and cultural destruction, one cannot help but conclude that of all the holocausts of history, none surpasses this one (1993:115).

Upon reflecting on this age which witnessed the enslavement of Africans and the ushering in of European colonialism, its very character coerces us to face human realities such as racism, sexism, religious dogmatism and economic stratification. Yet, in my view, literature, via the form of the novel, is and has been a supportive vehicle in which people of all backgrounds are able to reason, reflect and critique actions and decisions enacted in our historical past. What is unique about reasoning within the framework of fiction is that it is the imaginational construction of the writer which frames our perspectives and approach towards a particular phase of human evolution. In the context of this thesis, Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is the fictional framework and the colonial encounter between African and European individuals and groups in the novel will be the subject of analysis.

In particular, this thesis is interested in Achebe's representation of power *relationships* amongst African people before the initial colonial encounter, and after it. By probing the forms and symbols of power in Chinua Achebe's novel, *Things Fall Apart*, this research project aims to dissect the manners by which Achebe's characters perceived or encountered facets of power within it. In addition to incorporating the appraisals of well-established post-colonial critics, the unique world-view of Krishnamurti will be harnessed in this approach towards Achebe's text. Krishnamurti was a teacher from India, who attempted to share a way of living which emphasised *seeing* instead of categorising, theorising, and philosophising about *what is seen*. Krishnamurti thought that:

We are apt to forget that our society, the culture in which we live, which has conditioned us, is the result of human endeavour, conflict, human misery and suffering. Each one of us is that culture; the community is each one of us – we are not separate from it. To *feel* this, not as an intellectual idea or a concept, but to actually feel the reality of this, one has to go into the question of what is relationship; because our life, our existence, is based on relationship (1973:75).

Krishnamurti blamed the existence of war, poverty, human division, conflict and tension on the limitations of theory and ideology as tools in solving human dilemmas. In his perspective, theories, ideas, philosophies (including the religious, spiritual) and even our captivation with thoughts, were insufficient in bringing about the types of changes required to reverse the norms of the modern world: the existence of the status quo, famine, war, incurable disease, and human strife. In his words, “the understanding of ‘what is’ [such as the above-mentioned problems] – not comparing ‘what is’ with ‘what should be’ - in that understanding flowers goodness” (1973:85). Krishnamurti perceived that various ideas and hypothetical thinking hindered the process whereby human beings *act* upon critical issues. Instead, a keen awareness on the individual level, which focused on one's relationship to one's self (thoughts and emotions) and others, was needed to radically transform both ourselves and the world around us. Speaking of thought, he asserts: “[it] is based on the background that is our conditioning; whatever we think

is...merely a reaction” (1992:31). In this postulation, our thoughts are viewed as accumulated results of our past experiences, educationally and socially acquired. Yet, Krishnamurti reasoned that “there is a difference between information,” which to him is knowledge, and wisdom, which in his perspective is “the processes of being aware of our thoughts or feelings” (1992:31). I am of the perspective that these ideas may be incorporated in an analysis of a fictional text such as *Things Fall Apart*. Though I am by no means suggesting that our thoughts must be set aside in engaging the novel, I am proposing that the process of *seeing in our minds* that which Achebe depicted via his art, and reasoning or acting upon *what we see*, is similar to the suggestions made by Krishnamurti about the processes of human self-understanding. To clarify this point, I believe that by focusing upon the mental images created by a fictional text without a preconceived theoretical approach of them will also produce understanding, in the same manner that theories assist us in the same process of comprehension. Throughout this thesis I will refer to this process of *seeing* literature as the Krishnamurtian approach.

What, then, is the relationship between Krishnamurti’s views and Achebe’s depiction of power relationships in *Things Fall Apart*? I felt that it was vital to incorporate and harness a Krishnamurtian life-outlook with Achebe’s imaginary world for the following reasons. It assists us in removing any romantic notions we might have about the pre-colonial epoch, it allows greater focus on the African as individual instead of as member of a community and it objectively compares the abuse of power in pre-colonial Africa with that of the colonial phase. In my view, focusing on individual experiences, such as those of Okonkwo, Nwoye and Achebe are numerous other characters is equally important to the group or community perspective. Each one of the characters provides their unique and insightful angle into how individuals in the pre-colonial past might have viewed power, authority and culture in their respective society. As Gikandi highlights: “Achebe [was] contesting the representation of the African in the novels of Conrad and Cary who [had] the propensity to represent the continent as either a blank space or a monstrous presence” (1991:27). This deliberate dissolving of the African personality and expression of individuality on the part of the aforementioned western writers, and Achebe’s commendable and successful counterattack to it via *Things Fall Apart* are not

questioned by this analysis. Instead, what I intend to investigate and highlight – with the assistance of Krishnamurti’s view of human relations - is the existence of power outside the sphere of a ‘group,’ culture or political institution, yet as an entity which manifests itself in conditioned and culturally-derived *acts* of dominance between these very entities. Within the colonial context of *Things Fall Apart*, this includes the cultural motifs and justification of the existence of a political and spiritual elite. These elite figures control the power of the indigenous and colonial political and spiritual power structures.

Via a Krishnamurtian outlook, the portrayal of cultural tension in *Things Fall Apart* transcends such polarised interpretations as east versus west or the (African) indigenous versus the foreign-other (European). Instead, when adopting a Krishnamurtian outlook and a critical approach to the processes of colonialism, we discern the following: fear and uncertainty on the part of the masses were utilised by both the African elite and colonial administrators to manipulate the human power of the people; this is the crutch of the argument behind this thesis’s analysis. Krishnamurti was deeply concerned with the role fear plays in our lives. “Why does the unconscious hold fears at all?” (1979:94) he asks. Is it that we as humans choose to fear or be intimidated by forms of authority or power, or were these reactions built or conditioned into us? My perspective is that our cultural conditioning requires an amount of fear of authority in order for the very conditioning to persist. Continuing with his interrogation of fear, Krishnamurti enquires: “[is fear] an inherent part of the unconscious, of the racial, traditional history of [hu]man[s]” (1979:94)? These are critical and deep questions we have to ask ourselves and which this thesis intends to dissect. My position is that fear is not composite of the infantile human state, where we first encounter the world before our thoughts are expressed in words. Instead, fear – whether justifiable or not – is imprinted inside of us via the instruction, caution and advice of significant others and the society around us.

To the villagers of Umuofia, the strangers from the distant lands brought foreign customs, traditions and gods. Before violence arose between the villagers and the Europeans, language was exchanged in which each side attempted to share meaning with the other. As Achebe describes one of these initial encounters:

When they had all gathered, the white man began to speak to them. He spoke through an interpreter who was an Ibo man, though his dialect was different and harsh to the ears of Mbanta. Many people laughed at his dialect and the way he used words strangely (1958:126).

In the above extract, we view language (as a conveyer of meaning) acting as a human creation which produces or leaves room for division. Though originally the meeting parties might not have sought antagonism, language or words contributed to the outcome. The 'white' man had to communicate via an interpreter with the people of Mbanta. The interpreter himself was ridiculed because of his accent. What we detect when language transposes itself (as depicted in the above extract), is that meaning may be confused or incorrectly transferred; meaning or intent may be muddled. Perhaps this is why the individuals broke into laughter above. This disorder of meaning may occur on both the individual and collective planes. Though language as a means of communication was instantaneously a bridge between the parties of this original encounter, it was still the channel whereby the newly introduced could misunderstand or even debate with each other. Eventually, the 'white' man (an agent of European colonialism and Christianity) tells his African listeners that: "they worshipped false gods, gods of wood and stone" (1958:126). Achebe noticeably allows the reader to be aware of the fact that the Africans who were listening to these statements were not unmoved, as "a deep murmur went through the crowd" (1958; 126). Here, via the vehicle of language, notions of difference between East and West arise – this is a foreboding of the eventual competition for the claim to truth and authority by various Umuofians and Europeans. Achebe's role as protector of the insulted and attacked culture is to be respected. As Walsh suggests, he sees it as his duty to: "help [his] society regain its belief in itself and put away the complexes of the years of denigration and self-denigration" (1973:184). How does Achebe achieve this? It is impossible in an analysis of this length to probe each offensive and artistic technique Achebe employs to defend the dignity of the African individual and tradition, but one notable technique is his own literary construction and representation of

the African past as a dignified and complex scheme, as opposed to the Conrad-styled depiction of Africa as a dark slate.

Achebe has been credited for his meticulous presentation of cultural and ritualistic illustrations in *Things Fall Apart*. As Guide concedes, “Achebe has succeeded in creating a very vivid picture of African society in the process of change” (1988:126). The novel allows us to see how Africans lived in the pre-colonial dispensation through Achebe’s eyes. Achebe’s defense of the African self, in his constructed images, were not of perfect beings, but those intellectual and noble in character, opposed to the heathen we regarded via the eyes of Conrad. We learn that: “among the Ibo the art of conversation is regarded very highly, and proverbs are the palm-oil with which words are eaten” (1958:6). Simultaneously we discover that: “Umuofia was feared by all its neighbours. It was powerful in war and in magic, and its priests and medicine-men were feared in all the surrounding country” (1958:11). For the downtrodden post-colonial African, looking back in time through Achebe’s eyes, it is clear that the people of the continent were once a regal, highly intelligent and fearless gathering of nations. Simultaneously, could it realistically be that all pre-colonial Africans accepted the order of authority, culture and tradition as natural and never to be challenged? These voices, sentiments and characters are not wholly absent from *Things Fall Apart*, but they are lesser in number compared to the pro-acceptance of the indigenous regime. It is this type of personality, which I find mirrored in Achebe’s character Nwoye, which intrigues me. As surely as there are objectors of the ANC in modern day South Africa, surely, during the pre-colonial age, there were individuals who questioned the order of power and authority. I believe that when the Europeans arrived, their very presence presented an opportunity for such minds (whether with positive intentions or not) to develop new ways of understanding themselves and their social worlds. As Krishnamurti might have stressed, the new relationships that were formed paved the way for increased consciousness of self on the part of the Africans. Krishnamurti wants us to understand “that if we allow it, all relationship acts as a mirror in which to perceive clearly” (1992:4) When Africans originally encountered Europeans, this process of relationship (though undeniably horrid at times) coerced and intensified the African individual into a process of self-

examination. Relationship, continues Krishnamurti: “gives the necessary focus to see sharply, but ... if we are blinded by prejudice, opinions, beliefs, we cannot, however poignant relationship is, see clearly, without bias. Then relationship is not a process of self-revelation” (1992:4) Given this affirmation by Krishnamurti I must add that those Africans, as described in *Things Fall Apart*, who strove to comprehend the new way of life, reflected the above-mentioned tendency to increase the knowledge of self in relationship to the new relations they encountered. These individuals, as Carroll sees them are, “at the other end of the spectrum from the organisation of [indigenous] society” (1990:39). Here, outside of the political structure, “is the life of the self, and here too the reciprocal bargaining between competing claims is apparent” (1990:39). This competing or claim of aspects of the self can be found in Nwoye, who was torn at the bargaining table where Christianity and indigenous realm met.

Chapter One

Krishnamurti: Pre-colonial Africa and Power in *Things Fall Apart*

In his writing, Krishnamurti often asserts that those who instill *fear* in others behave in such a manner due to their own insecurities and inability to face their own inner-selves (1992:4). People who act in this manner cause tension with the receivers of their aggression. “In this relationship of psychological dependence, there must always be conscious or unconscious fear [and] suspicion” (1992:1). To me, Okonkwo, the central character in Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, represents such a persona. When we first meet him, power surrounds his aura like bees around their queen. The first few lines of the novel read: “Okonkwo was well known throughout the nine villages and even beyond. His fame rested on solid personal achievements” (1958:3). Upon encountering this description, our minds create images of a successful and powerful man. Okonkwo was also known for defeating Amalinze the Cat, who was acknowledged as the greatest wrestler whose back never touched the ground. “It was this man that Okonkwo threw in a fight which the old men agreed was one of the fiercest since the founder of their town engaged a spirit of the wild for seven days and seven nights” (1958:3). I consider as true that Achebe constructed Okonkwo’s characterisation as such to not only represent the ultimate fall of a great African warrior, but simultaneously, to reveal cracks and abuse of power within the traditional, African scheme of living. Okonkwo:

pounce[d] on people quite often. He had a slight stammer and whenever he was angry and could not get his words out quickly enough, he would use his fists. He said he had no patience with unsuccessful men (1958: 4).

These are not traits to be admired. Does it mean that because Okonkwo was mighty, prosperous – that Achebe’s depiction of his behaviour above should be accepted as praiseworthy? Gikandi disagrees when he reminds us that even though “Okonkwo knows his mind” (1991:28), ultimately “his tragedy arises...from pursuing the logic of his own existence too much [and] pushing the communal ethos to the limits ... hence undermining [its core principles] in the process” (1991:28). Via Gikandi’s suggestion, we

see that even successful individuals such as Okonkwo are able to exceed the limits of reason when striving to be counted amongst the elite. According to Krishnamurti, Okonkwo's type of demeanour is not only self-destructive to the enactor of such aggression, but to all whom the aggression affects. He suggests that "without understanding [the intimacies of] relationship, merely to cultivate compassion, forgiveness, is to bring about self-isolation and to indulge in subtle forms of pride" (1992:3). In his drive to establish relationships with the upper-echelon of his village hierarchy, Okonkwo lost touch with subtle human gentilities, such as being kind and soft to the weaker; his relationship with his family was stressed. As the novel progresses, we also discover that as a result of his destructive behaviour, Okonkwo is eventually isolated from his beloved village.

My personal stance is that Achebe's introduction of Okonkwo as such a physically and financially strong individual is a foreboding of his ultimate demise and a lesson for male abuse of power. "Okonkwo ruled his household with a heavy hand. His wives, especially the youngest, lived in perpetual fear of his fiery temper, and so did his little children" (1958:12). Clear to see, Okonkwo abused and miss-managed his power as his wives and children are portrayed as victims of his notoriety. Achebe uses the word 'perpetual' to illustrate that this was a man with a furious temper. Yet, the narrator also concedes that: "[p]erhaps, down in his heart Okonkwo was not a cruel man. But his whole life was dominated by fear, the fear of failure and weakness" (1958:12). This is precisely the fear addressed by Krishnamurti, which erodes the fabric of communication, love and relationship.

As I stated in the introduction, power does not necessarily manifest or need to be analysed in terms of who the holder is, within the specter of the person or group. Instead, when domination (including oppression, subjugation and the accompanying fear) occurs, power selects its agents to manifest the strong and weak. As depicted above, Okonkwo was the powerful agent over the physically weaker women and children. Gagliano, in her analysis of *Things Fall Apart*, notes that "an over-whelming male power structure [with an] inherently patriarchal quality" (2000:67), existed in Umuofia. As Okonkwo was a

member of his village's elite, he formed part of the network referred to by Gagliano. What Achebe has illustrated in his construction of Okonkwo's personality, is that men in positions of authority, or in the process of attempting to increase their status in their society, will resort to violence or oppression of the immediate weak in their environment, as a result of the ambitions. An outcome of Okonkwo's fear of becoming a failure like his father in the eyes of his society was the continued abuse he inflicted upon his family due to his quest for power.

Krishnamurti states that in order for us to understand fear, we must "try and find out what [we] are afraid of and see if [we] cannot go beyond that fear, not verbally, not theoretically, but actually" (1974:42). It is possible to go beyond Okonkwo's fears to comprehend his abuse of power? There are clues in the novel which may assist such a question. Achebe writes that Okonkwo's fear:

Was deeper and more intimate than the fear of evil and capricious gods and of magic, the fear of the forest, and of the forces of nature, malevolent, red in tooth and claw. Okonkwo's fear was greater than these (1959:12).

Due to this fear, Okonkwo strove to maintain a level of prestige and respect in the village, Okonkwo violated basic principles of human dignity by abusing his family. Achebe proceeds:

It [Okonkwo's fear] was not external but lay deep within himself. It was the fear of himself, lest he should be found to resemble his father. Even as a little boy he had resented his father's failure and weakness (1958:12).

Due to Unoka's failures in life, Okonkwo became bitter. In his quest to overcome his fear, gain power and an image which was contrary to that of his father's outward show, others (such as his family) were victimised. His wives and children were used as

scapegoats; they were the receivers of his violent frustration in his attempt to live a life which negated that of his father's. We discern that there could be truth in Krishnamurti's assertion that: "[perhaps] we are related to someone only as long as that relationship gratifies us, as long as it gives us a refuge, as long as it satisfies us" (1992:11). It appears that Okonkwo's family gratified him when he needed to relief stress from a society that upheld values not easily maintained. From a psychoanalytical perspective, it seems logical to assume that Okonkwo grew to be such a man, since in the early, human childhood developmental stages one's parents play a crucial and critical role. Erik Erikson, in his book *Identity, Youth and Crisis* expounds that when a youth is exploring his role in his new world: "he is of course, deeply and exclusively 'identified' with his parents, who most of the time appear to him to be powerful and beautiful, although often quite unreasonable, disagreeable, and even dangerous" (1968:115). Though Erikson was describing the very early stages of a child's development, the vital role a parent plays in a child's maturity and growth cannot be underestimated. Achebe's description of Okonkwo's father clearly illustrates that Unoka was not to be admired or identified as a role-model.

Unoka the grown-up was a failure. He was poor and his wife and children had barely enough to eat. People laughed at him because he was a loafer, and they swore never to lend him any more money because he never paid back (1958:5).

These growing experiences with an indolent father left lasting impressions on Okonkwo, which in turn produced a bitter and fearful, fear-producing adult. When viewing the development of this troubled man, Krishnamurti's surmise that "[f]ear and deterioration are related" (1974:3), rings true for human development in pre-colonial Africa as it does today. Okonkwo's fear of becoming like his father eventually eroded the possibility of him having a peaceful relationship with those in his family. "As you grow older," continues Krishnamurti, "unless you solve the problem of fear as it arises, immediately, without carrying it over to tomorrow, the deteriorating factor sets in. It is like a disease, like a wound which festers, destroys" (1974:3). Okonkwo's fear or inner conflict caused

him to strive for power in his society and continuously harm his loved ones. He succeeded in achieving worldly prestige. Unlike Unoka's predicament, "he was a wealthy farmer and had two barns full of yams, and had just married his third wife. To crown it all he had taken two titles and had shown incredible prowess in two inter-tribal wars" (1958:7). This deliberate display of ambition for power and wealth contrasts with the stereotypical image of pre-colonial Africans as meek, humble and at-one-with-nature beings. In fact, Okonkwo's striving for wealth sustains Krishnamurti's suggestion that: "fear may be the cause of [Okonkwo's type of] aggression because society is so constructed that a citizen who has a position of respect is treated with great courtesy, whereas a man who has no position at all is kicked around" (1973:246). Unoka was a man without titles and his son's worst fear was to be placed into a similar position.

Okonkwo was still young; he was already one of the greatest men of his time. Age was respected among his people, but achievement was revered. As the elders said, if a child washed his hands he could eat with kings (1958:7).

In traditional and pre-colonial (Igbo) society, power was centralised in the hands of a few men. These men were not vague numbers amongst members of the masses of Umuofia, but men who possessed wealth, and like Okonkwo, had achieved *titles*. These titles, significantly (and symbolically), created an undeniable separation between this ruling elite and the extended village community. In Krishnamurti's view, such symbols and the divisions they highlight amongst a people, further promote the alienation of certain individuals (especially those on the periphery of power). Regarding the position of the individual within the hierarchical scheme of their society, he affirms: "If we do not understand what is implied in relationship [between the strong and weak] we inevitably not only isolate ourselves, but create a society in which human beings are divided, not only nationally, religiously, but also in themselves" (1973:75). My view is that Nwoye represents a character with such divisions within himself, but we will reach his disposition shortly. Dennis Duerden confirms the above-mentioned mode of indigenous stratification when he examines the admittance of a male into a (male-restricted) African

council of elders. “The association of elders can make the process difficult by making success depend on the learning of secrets they preserve *for themselves* [emphasis added] and on the making of sacrifices and the distribution of food and drink at prescribed ceremonies which a *poor* [emphasis added] man can ill afford” (1975:26). These types of processes are mirrors of the types of rites undergone by Okonkwo to reach his respected position among the elite. In investigating the intricacy behind a man’s ascension in the village hierarchy, Duerden and Achebe not only refute the racist image of the indolent African, as created by writers such as Conrad, but also confirm the existence of complex cultural practices which maintain the gap between the elite and the masses. In *Things Fall Apart* a villager observes this chasm when he speaks critically of Okonkwo. “Looking at a king’s mouth,” he says, “one would think he never sucked at his mother’s breast,” (1958:23) he says scornfully. In other words, Okonkwo’s behaviour does not resemble that of a humble man who recently was in dire straits. Achebe might be including this parable to assert that even though Okonkwo “had risen so suddenly from great poverty and misfortune to be one of the *lords* [emphasis added] of the clan,” (1958:23) he was condescending when “dealing with less successful men” (1958:23). As suggested by the commoner above, this characterisation portrays a man who is arrogant and whose wealth has disconnected him from the masses of the people who were not title holders like himself.

George Ayittey, in his study, *Indigenous African Institutions*, warrants that: “in many [stateless and pre-colonial] societies, there was a clear separation between power (defined as the ability to influence events in a desired direction) and authority (meaning the acknowledged or recognized right to exercise power). One did not necessarily flow from the other” (1991:82). Speaking of the actual society upon which Achebe’s novel is based, Ayittey continues:

Among the Igbo [of Nigeria] inequality was recognized in age, status, wealth, religion, birth and descent. Royalty was in name and not in fact, as the Igbo recognized achievement rather than hereditary-bestowed greatness (1991:25).

As an example of the discord which may arise within such a scheme of stratification in *Things Fall Apart*, the following harsh words from Okonkwo towards a fellow villager reflect condescending values of the ruling elite of his time. When he puts down a man whom he perceives with scorn, it is written:

Without looking at the man Okonkwo said: 'This meeting is for men.'
The man who had contradicted him had no titles. That was why he
had called him a woman. Okonkwo knew how to kill a man's spirit
(1958:23).

A pre-colonial perspective toward the status of women is distinctly revealed in the above extract. Okonkwo's statement was not only intended to insult the receiver of his words, but indicates that women within traditional society were viewed as inferior. Achebe confirms the impact and meaning behind these words by reiterating that, in saying so, "Okonkwo knew how to kill a man's spirit" (1958: 23). Another example of such male-biased standards is where Achebe writes: "No matter how prosperous a man was, if he was unable to rule his women and his children (*and especially his women*) [emphasis added] he was not really a man." (1958:47). Ayittey further confirms the inferior power role and position of women within traditional Igbo society by informing us that: "At the village level, every adult Igbo *male* [emphasis inserted] had the right to sit in on the council meetings" (1991:82). Here, crucial decisions relating to the greater community were exacted. In this process, women were excluded and marginalised. The function of these village councils, as illustrated numerous times in Achebe's text, was not for menial matters. "The council was the controlling authority in the village. It performed all the functions which a chief and his council of elders performed in [a] chief dome" (1991:83).

Interestingly enough, Ayittey is keen on emphasising the 'egalitarian' and democratic nature of such societies, by asserting that the young and old, rich and poor were afforded the opportunity to express their views in crucial matters (1991:83). However, he neglects to sufficiently acknowledge the limited access women had to this axis of power and

decision-making. The actuality of the matter is that during the pre-colonial age, it befitted the Igbo men of that time to side line the females; in doing so they created engendered lines of stratification, reserving greater access to power for themselves. As evidence of this, Ayittey refers to Olaniyan who sketched five basic features of stateless societies in western Africa. Olaniyan concedes that there was a definite pattern whereby men, regardless of their age grade, commanded the political system. Other than male family heads, who presided over the village councils, “wealthy personages and some title holders, particularly the *Ozo* title holders” (1991:83) were incorporated into this inner circle of dominion. Hence, when the village of Umuofia gathers (such as on the Ilo for wrestling events) “the elders and grandees...sat on their own stools brought there by their young sons or slaves. Okonkwo was one of them” (1958:41). Relating to this social division, I strongly disagree with Diop that in pre-colonial Africa, such caste systems existed because “the dynamic elements of society, whose discontent might have engendered revolution, [were] really satisfied with their social condition and [did] not seek to change it” (1987:1). Human history and revolutions, such as the French Revolution, have shown us the world over that those groups of a nation who are subjugated by supreme elite will revolt. Europe and Asia have ample evidence of this. Why should Africans have been any different from other peoples, and accept inferior treatment? I perceive that Achebe makes an unambiguous distinction between the above-mentioned holders of power and the masses when he writes: “all others stood except those who came early enough to secure places on the few stands which had been built by placing smooth logs on forked pillars” (1958:41). This may be an endeavor to show the privileged position of the few, compared to the lesser standards of the many. What is significant to the focus of this thesis, in the above-alignment, is that such an order of authority or prestige was built into the very fiber of Umuofian society; after centuries of pre-colonial evolution, Africans had incorporated forms of stratification into their own network of relationships. Diop supports this notion by saying: “in Africa, it [was] not rare for members of the lower caste to refuse to enter into conjugal relations with those of the higher caste, even though the reverse would seem more normal” (1987:1). According to Diop’s suggestion, aspiring to ascend the political or economic hierarchy within pre-

colonial society was not necessarily desirable. Nevertheless, Okonkwo was not this type of individual; he was ambitious.

Many years after pre-colonial Africa, Krishnamurti made a statement that: “The ambitious man seems to be the respected entity [as well as] the aggressive man who wants to succeed, to intrigue, to pull strings and so get to the top of the heap” (1974:103). I believe this opinion of the drive to succeed within society has usefulness in our approach to the demeanour of men such as Okonkwo. Krishnamurti’s statement reflects the struggle undergone by Okonkwo and the eventual respect he received. He had to be aggressive to overcome his father’s reputation and the values of his society, which set a successful man apart from a failure. Hence, when Carroll suggests that “when all ...claims and duties are in equilibrium, the [pre-colonial, African] individual is in a position to act decisively [yet] one is in limited control of one’s destiny,” (1990:39) he concedes that an individual’s choices and ability to act upon them are directly affected by the mores and hierarchical values of his society. We perceive of Okonkwo’s early struggle to attain a dignified and respected manner of living when we read of his initial venture into farming.

Share-cropping was a very slow way of building up a barn of one’s own. After all the toil one only got a third of the harvest. But for a young man whose father had no yams, there was no other way. And what made it worse in Okonkwo’s case was that he had to support his mother and two sisters from his meager harvest. And supporting his mother also meant supporting his father. And so at a very early age when he was striving desperately to build a barn through share-cropping Okonkwo was also fending for his father’s house. It was like pouring grains of corn into a bag full of holes (1958:20-21).

Unlike the prejudiced image of Africans as docile creatures, or as animal like beasts in the field, Achebe has effectively painted a picture of pre-colonial life where realistically,

an African struggles to attain dignity and survive in day-to-day living. Okonkwo struggled to support himself and his family. Of past and contemporary human worlds, where many find it difficult to survive and attain the basic needs, Krishnamurti states, it “is the product of man – there is nothing holy, or divine, or eternal about [it or its related] culture” (1973:189). In pre-colonial Africa, as in the rest of human society, certain individuals struggled to survive while others benefited from this very struggling.

Krishnamurti writes that tradition “is not only one’s particular set of inheritances but also the weight of all the collective thought of a particular group of people who have lived in a particular culture and tradition” (1970:108). He continues to mention that: “One carries the accumulated knowledge and experiences of the race and the family” (1970:108). If we apply this affirmation to our dissection of power relationships and culture in *Things Fall Apart*, the following is plausible; underlying Achebe’s fictional portrayal of Igbo inter-communication lays a suggestion which states that through many centuries, the masses of the African non-elite came to accept the structures of authority as intrinsic to their survival, existence or as evidence of obedience to their gods. In fact, this mode of living was self-perpetuated in the cultural and spiritual fabric of Igbo and Umuofian society. In pre-colonial education of the youth, cultural values were transmitted via holistic means which practically linked daily survival to intellectual development and social acculturation. To Krishnamurti, this very *acculturation* of the youth might be problematic, since it conditions and molds the youth’s perception of power relations and norms in their society. He asks: “Is this right, is this what education is meant for, that you should willingly or unwillingly fit into this mad structure called society” (1974:8)? To Krishnamurti, society, as we know it, is a world of “fighting, quarrelling, bullying [and] tearing at each other” (1974:8). Though this particular quote appears to be a pessimistic view of human institutions, it is a fair estimation of what we as humans have to go through in order to survive on a daily basis.

Achebe includes illustrations of pre-colonial education as a conveyor of social meaning in his text. For example: “Okonkwo encouraged [his] boys to sit with him in his *obi*, and he told them stories of the land – *masculine* [emphasis added] stories of violence and

bloodshed” (1958:47). Nwoye, on the other hand, who was one of Okonkwo’s sons, is a reluctant receptor of the cultural messages and values in his fathers’ stories. In constructing Nwoye’s subtle rejection of harsh, masculine values, Achebe exposes the following: Not all of Umuofian society accepted the cultural pattern and norms of the established village. Here I must note that this variance of proposition, as compared to Diop’s recommendation that Africans did not aspire to exit caste lines, pose an opposition of opinions. This opposition is also highlighted in Nwoye’s preference for stories which were shared and told by his mother.

Nwoye *knew* [emphasis added] that it was right to be masculine and to be violent, but somehow he still preferred the stories that his mother used to tell, and which she no doubt still told to her younger children – stories of the tortoise and his wily ways, and of the bird eneke-nti-oba who challenged the whole world to a wrestling contest and was finally thrown by the cat (1958:47).

In the extract above, we clearly detect a chasm in the young man’s psyche. On the one hand, his father stresses that he should be violent and rough; yet, upon introspection, Nwoye acknowledges the existence of a gentler side in his nature as a young man, which Achebe aligns with women (his mother and her stories). Achebe reveals Nwoye’s warm preference for his maternal values when he writes: “[those were] the kind of stor[ies] that Nwoye loved” (1958:47). Though Nwoye’s relationships with stories literally reflect a son’s compassion and identity with his mother, they dually address the pre-colonial individual’s construction of his relationship to the conflicting values surrounding him. Clearly, this young man opted for a gentler and less violent mode of relationship with others. Ayittey discusses the difference in perceptions of the two genders in pre-colonial Africa. By referring to *Jackson*, he stresses that:

Paternal and maternal roles in child-rearing are different and compl[e]mentary: the paternal [is supposed to parallel] jural authority, discipline, provision of food, and social identification; the

maternal role connotes emotional attachment, personal care, and nurturance (1991:8).

Clearly, the stories favoured by Nwoye's two parents above, reflect the societal values explicated above (Jackson).

According to Berger, embedded within the language of stories are endless meanings and signs – these signs (when accepted by an individual or child) become a part of that individual's world-view. "A sign may be distinguished from other objectivities by its explicit intention to serve as an index of subjective meanings" (1967:35). As a child gathers more signs and information by which it forms its world-view, it expands its 'subjective' database of perception. The view that signs, when incorporated within an individual's outlook (as accepted via Nwoye's parent's stories) form an 'index of subjective meaning' (1967:35) relates to us that indeed, views of power or other human relationships are passed on (not only in the family but) through a culture's processes of inducting the youth into its social order. Geertz clarifies this notion when we read:

At the political center of any complexly organised society, there existed a governing elite and a set of symbolic forms expressing the fact that it is in truth governing. No matter how democratically the members of the elite are chosen or how deeply divided among themselves they may be, they justify their existence and order their actions in terms of a collection of stories, ceremonies, insignia, formalities, and appurtenances that they have either inherited, or in more revolutionary situations, invented. It is these that mark the center [of power] and give what goes on there its aura of being not merely important but in some odd fashion connected with the way the world is built (1995:3).

As Okonkwo is a member of the above-described center in *Things Fall Apart*, his son was heavily impacted by his representation and views of power and masculinity. They affect his own creation of identity and relationship with the power structures of Umuofia.

Even though Nwoye loved his mother's stories, "he now knew that they were for foolish women and children, and he knew that his father wanted him to be a man. And so he feigned that he no longer cared for women's stories" (1958: 47-48). The over-bearing pressures of a paternal society coerced the young man to suppress his true, inner feelings. Perhaps this is why Krishnamurti remarked that: "culture and society have [hypothetically] hypnotised you" (1973:189). Because of gender power constructions, Nwoye is divided within himself. He is pressured into pretending to not love stories which he loves. "And when he did this he saw that his father was pleased, and no longer rebuked him or beat him" (1958; 48). Okonkwo is ruthless in enforcing his version of discipline and respect. It is not only oppressive towards women, but also towards the psychological development of his children. For this reason, as Okonkwo told the boys stories of the past, "they sat in darkness or dim glow of logs, waiting for the women to finish their cooking" (1958:48). I believe that this darkness is symbolic of the limitations of Okonkwo's manner of thinking.

To Krishnamurti, such a manipulative abuse of the love of stories or learning by Okonkwo over his son is a reflection of the conditioning effect and misuse of education in oppressive sectors of the world. I would add the Muslim schools which encourage terrorist activities among young and innocent boys to this list. Krishnamurti states that:

We see what education has been used for. Human beings throughout the world – whether in Russia or in China or in America or in Europe or in this country – are being educated to conform, to fit into society and into their culture, to fit into the stream of social and economic activity, to be sucked into that vast stream that has been flowing for thousands of years (1974:10).

This viewpoint may be applied to the examination of enculturation practices of pre-colonial Africa. *Things Fall Apart* presents multiple examples of how culture and belief affect the power relationships amongst groups and individuals. Let us consider the triangular connection between the individual, the spiritual cosmos and the interceding human agents. In pre-colonial Africa, the African spiritual realm corresponded directly

with the relationship between the individual, the extended community and the natural environment. Achebe provides a vivid illustration of such meta-physical activity in the dynamics of the Umuofian Week of Peace. During this spiritual tradition: “no work was to be done...people called on their neighbours and drank palm-wine” (1958:27). Indeed, this period held significant and symbolic meaning to the villagers. The purpose of this joyous and reflective tradition was to prepare for the new cycle of planting. The gods of the village demanded that such observation of a “week in which a man does not say a harsh word to his neighbour,” and in which Umuofians “live in peace with their fellows to honour [their] great goddess of the earth without whose blessing [their] crops [would] not grow” (1958; 27), was respected on the highest level of consciousness. Visibly, this human construction (via tradition) dispels the myth of pre-colonial Africans as order-less heathens. Peace and harmony was the explicit value that all the Umuofians recognized.

Yet, within this configuration of mass inculcation of group values, I believe that Achebe’s use of Okonkwo’s violent temperament dispels the idea that the will or precedents of *the community* may always over-power the will, intention or natural disposition of *the individual*. In my estimation, Okonkwo’s anger and violent outburst symbolise the strength and ability of an individual to resist or challenge established values. Though negative, “in [Okonkwo’s] anger he had forgotten that it was the Week of Peace” (1958:26) and beat one of his wives “heavily” (1958:26). Carroll agrees that the roots of such behaviour were results “driven by [Okonkwo’s] ... private obsession...to succeed in terms of warfare, wrestling, wealth and status” (1990:41). Perhaps emphasising both Okonkwo’s abuse of power and the dysfunctional nature of his behaviour within the scheme of his village’s value network, Achebe writes: “Okonkwo was not the man to stop beating somebody half-way through, not even for fear of a goddess” (1958:26). What, then, does this scornful attitude represent or convey about the relationship between the individual, the extended community and symbols of power? Krishnamurti reflects that: “a society, whose structure is based on mere need, whether physiological or psychological, must breed conflict, confusion and misery” (1992:45). This is a profound proclamation, for, are not all societies, whether modern or pre-colonial, based upon a form of physiological or psychological need? I believe that

indirectly, human societies do create this dependence and that the characters in *Things Fall Apart* who are inferior in wealth or status to Okonkwo, the elders and the wealthy are indirectly coerced, though their spiritual and cultural precepts, to acquiesce to the wants of the financially superior. Let us engage these issues as they unfold in Achebe's fiction.

How do we identify physiological or psychological need as displayed in *Things Fall Apart*? Between which characters do such examples of dependence reveal themselves? I propose that within the novel the inter-related realms of family, spiritual and political sectors reflect the outward characteristics or behaviour correlated to psychological need. On a meta-physical and spiritual plane, a social order is suggested for how African humans should behave and order relations of authority, values and power. This is reflected in the duties and revered opinion of the priestess. Within the context of *Things Fall Apart*, Chielo is an example of a human who possesses more power or authority than others within Umuofian relationships. When she demands that Enzima, one of Okonkwo's daughters and the child of Ekwefi, be brought to the dwelling place of Agbala, a clear distinction and power separation is indicated between the common villager and the powerful or influential. Ekwefi asks to accompany her child out of love and concern, but the priestess retorts: "How dare you, woman, to go before the mighty Agbala of your own accord? Beware woman, lest he strike you in *his* [emphasis added] anger" (1958:89-90). When Chielo takes Ekwefi's daughter, Achebe depicts a defeated mother: "A strange and sudden weakness descended on Ekwefi as she stood gazing in the direction of the voices like a hen whose only chick has been carried away by a kite" (1958:90). The power of Chielo and Ekwefi's awareness of her underlying authority is not hidden above. Considering that this mother was not permitted to accompany her child, *who* decides who may occupy certain sacred or private spaces, such as the quarters of Agbala? What effort is required by a common villager to explore or access such spaces? My position is that during the pre-colonial epoch, such spaces were reserved for the selected few. As exemplified in Achebe's art, not even a mother's love for her daughter could reject the demand of a *human* agent of a god. Ekwefi possessed not the right, power or authority to hold or claim her own child. She was also not permitted to

enter the sacred space of Agbala. “Enzima’s voice soon faded away and only *Chielo* [emphasis added] was heard moving farther and farther into the distance” (1958:90).

Perhaps it was Achebe’s calculated intention to depict the extent to which Africans revered those who fulfilled spiritual roles on behalf of the village. This intent also counters earlier, fictional accounts which depicted as Africans as culture-less. Speaking of his disgust for Joyce Cary’s *Mr. Johnson*, Achebe said “I was very angry with this book” (1988:84). He felt as if Africa was utterly miss-represented by Cary’s work of art. Reflecting on his thoughts about Cary’s text and his inspiration to write, Achebe explained how he thought to himself that: “if somebody [such as Cary] without knowledge, without *inside* [emphasis added] knowledge of the people he’s trying to describe can get away with it, perhaps [he] ought to try [his] hand at it” (1988:84). As previously stated, I applaud any writer’s attempt to sincerely clarify or expand an accurate description of a society via fiction. Yet, Achebe’s reference to *inside* information about a particular culture is hazardous. Firstly, it supports the view that beyond external symbols or modes of rituals, human cultures are fundamentally *different* in terms of their foundational principles and values. I do not concur with this particular outlook. My personal perspective is that though the human family is diverse in its manner of cultural expression, essentially, basic principles such as respect and love are universal facets which transcend the boundaries of denomination or sect. Though a writer such as Cary might not possess the details of a culture other than his own, this should not forbid him to write about it. The danger of Cary’s type of writing, as rightly pointed out by Achebe, is that it could miss-lead the reading audience.

Hence, the separation between Ekwefi and her daughter – possibly symbolised by the ‘distance’ in-between them - symbolises what Krishnamurti sees as critical divisions and isolation of individuals and groups by the conformity towards aspects of traditions, theories and philosophies. These separations, upheld via the form of ideas, rules or rituals, replace transparent and egalitarian relationships between individuals; such relationship is vital to Krishnamurti. “Without relationship [represented by the separation of mother and child],” declares Krishnamurti, “there is no possibility of existence in life”

(1992:13). When Ekwefi is cut off from her daughter, her response is a result of her acquiescence to her culture, induced by cultural conditioning. Jabbi concedes that “culture, like life itself, is a dynamic or continuing process; and its qualities often depends upon a people’s response to evolutionary pressures from within or to stresses generated from without” (1979:135). The masses of Africans, in the pre-colonial dispensation, unmistakably had stresses from within their own cultural constructions; stresses and conformity which arose due to principles or social demands set by the political and spiritual elite. Krishnamurti attributes the acceptance of such values to an internal training of human beings which teaches us to see as ordinary the governance of the many by the few. “This relationship,” says Krishnamurti, “is one of use, of need, of comfort, of gratification, and it creates influences, values that bind us” (1986:4). Through the ages, the evolution of indigenous culture in Africa also bred the above-described relationships. African individuals also competed to survive in a pre-colonial world which demanded determination, ambition and the ability to succeed in the face of challenging circumstances. Such was the case for Okonkwo. Okonkwo became a cold man in the process of claiming respect in the eyes of the Umuofian village. His family and weaker individuals suffered from the anguish which grew in him as a result of his resolve not to be a failure in his society.

Chapter Two

Krishnamurti and Spirituality in *Things Fall Apart*

When the Europeans enter the Umuofian landscape, the villagers encounter forms of cultural shock on multiple dimensions. This shock reverberates through the entire communal network, authoritarian structures and through individual experience. The world-view of the Europeans, including their Christian values and perspectives, were to forever alter the manner by which Africans engaged the metaphysical realm of existence. The force with which the European missionaries approached the African peoples should also not be under-estimated. As stressed in Robert's text, "for most missionaries...developments at the turn of the century appeared as divine interventions enabling them to intensify their rapid occupation of Africa" (1990:141). There was a clear desire for the spiritual attention of the African masses by the European spiritualists. Since Achebe has fictionally situated Umuofia in West Africa, we should be aware that: "British and North American missionaries, from their early alliance with the humanitarian anti-slavery movement, saw Christianity intimately linked with legitimate commerce and the introduction of African societies to Western ways of life" (1990:143). These un-hidden correlations of the missionaries expose the competition for African, spiritual allegiance; precisely what the indigenous elite had managed or monopolised for many years. As Carroll reminds us, "the elders are [now] not merely concerned with the balancing of values within the tribe, for their whole way of life is threatened" (1990:51). As in *Things Fall Apart*, the very meeting between the African people and the newcomers was a process of revelation; that is, the Umuofians were forced into re-evaluating their world-views with the challenges posed by the new culture. Their beliefs, values and principles were turned around, irreversibly. As Ogbaa asserts, the Europeans "saw themselves as possessing a superior culture and civilisation that must be imposed upon a people they...considered primitive and uncivilised" (1999:50). The African reaction to the perceived competition of European culture resulted in either a defense of the indigenous manner of living, or an opening of it to possible metamorphosis. In order to justify the eventual, political dominance of Africans and colonial expansion,

Europeans circuitously imposed their way of life upon the conquered, by attempting to challenge or replace their spiritual, indigenous frameworks of conception.

The spiritual dimension of the African self became contested ground between the indigenous tradition of living and Christianity. The masses were affected by both the familiar and the new. Krishnamurti states that: "Our [various] responses are conditioned according to the pattern of society, whether it is eastern or western, religious or materialistic" (1970:20). I interpret this affirmation to suggest that when African people were first introduced to Christianity, their initial responses and understanding of it must naturally have been molded by their own spiritual views and values. It could be that though the linguistic expression of the missionaries was new, the ultimate acceptance of Christianity by many African individuals indicates the perception of commonalities of certain values between Christianity and indigenous spirituality by the Umuofians; enough so that people underwent the process of conversion. This is also the formation of a new power entity. Though I do not deny that the adoption of Christianity by Africans benefited the colonial scheme, I perceive that Africans also contributed to the formation of distinct communities, different in form from the European template and the original, indigenous pattern of living. As Roberts stresses, "even if the new beliefs and practices were gradually becoming an integral part of African religious life, Christians in Africa, both missionaries and Africans, were primarily concerned with creating new, distinctive communities" (1990:170). These spiritual formations challenge the image of the genesis of Christianity in Africa as solely a forceful or maliciously manipulated imposition.

Other than variations in language, specific cultural beliefs and blatant racist tactics on the part of the European imperialists, can we deduce that the western pattern of living, as exemplified by Christianity, had *different* spiritual, economic and, most importantly, political aims or outcomes - compared to those upheld, taught and cherished by the indigenous, African leaders, as found in *Things Fall Apart*? I do not perceive this to be the truth. Instead, as recommended earlier, it is my position that human power structures, represented by authorities of the spiritual and non-religious sectors, possess mental power which has a great influence on the relationship between the masses of people and the

material world. In Krishnamurti's view, this mental management is the stimulus of "action according to a pattern, according to a belief, [which] has set man against man" (1992:31). If we approach *Things Fall Apart* from the angle that there were indeed similarities between Christianity and indigenous, African culture, as represented by the religion of the Umuofians, we may infer that actual and historical clashes between these two entities were *not* the result of existing, common values. Instead, they were the consequences of the negative aspects of human nature, such as greed, prejudice and ambition, which are automatically attached to any facet of human existence, including the spiritual dimension. The human nature of individuals in positions of authority, and their material or egotistical goals, propelled the sense of antagonism and alienation between the first Europeans in Africa with the Africans themselves. I am referring to human nature on the part of the colonialists and the indigenous peoples. I am also asserting that negative human characteristics, behind the administration of the indigenous and colonial spiritual and cultural spheres, were responsible for the saga which would become the clash of cultures in Africa. In the case of this thesis, I am speaking of the destructive designs of the missionaries and the act of preservation of power amongst the African elite.

Ojinmah, in referring to the stylistics of Achebe's art, informs us of "Achebe's stated intent to preserve the traditional role of the artist in many indigenous African societies as both the custodian of the people's customs and traditions and proponent of its regenerative wisdom, without which the society, often is doomed" (1991:1). We may suppose that this preservation is a conscious reaction to changes brought about in African society as a result of the meeting between Africa and many cultures, including that of the West. Like the purpose of the griot in traditional African society, Achebe as the writer undertakes the role of preserver or recorder for his readers. Nostalgically, the images of *Things Fall Apart* conjure positive recollections and one is left with the sense that there is much to be proud of when it comes to Africa's past. Ojinmah believes that Achebe aimed "at preserving 'what life used to look like' and to tell 'their [African] story' from the perspective of an indigenous African" (1991:2). If we accept Achebe's art as an authentic medium whereby we access the African past, and we accept that there are commonalities

between eastern and western culture, surely his writing must also illustrate comparable approaches of how Africans and Europeans construct their relationships with each other and the natural environment.

Let us consider the link between indigenous spiritual beliefs and the connection with the land. In recalling the ill-fate of Unoka (Okonkwo's father), Achebe re-emphasises the central role the priestess and the gods play in the association between the cosmos, the land and human beings.

The Oracle was called Agbala, and people came from far and near to consult it. They came when miss-fortune dogged their steps or when they had a dispute with their neighbours. They came to discover what the future held for them or to consult the spirits of their departed fathers (1958:15).

In the extract above, the critical role which the divine plane plays in Umuofian affairs is outlined. The Oracle is seen as a force to be consulted in such critical moments when humans need guidance, when they die or when serious assistance is needed. A statute related to this function is highlighted when the Oracle is recorded as saying: "When a man is at peace with his gods and ancestors, his harvest will be good or bad according to the strength of his arm" (1990:39). Since Chielo, the village priestess, is the human intermediary between the gods and the commoners, she is in a position to consult the Oracle, unlike the masses of people who rely upon her intercession on their behalf; it is she who communicates the will of the divine. Krishnamurti decries this type of human upliftment of individuals, such as Chielo, in the name of leadership. In his estimation, positive progression in society or within an individual comes about not due to the upliftment of leaders or leadership, but via the inner-revolution of the individual who inspects his or her own thoughts and responses. Hence, he is skeptical of our tendency, as the masses, to follow leaders, when he asks: "Can another, whatever he [or she] be, enlightened or stupid, really help to dispel...darkness in oneself?" (1973:140). In other words – referring to the darkness of confusion, doubt or despair, can we truly rely on

leaders to solve our own problems? Krishnamurti is of the position that this is not a valid suggestion to solving the strife and suffering amongst human beings.

Unoka, Okonkwo's ill-fated father, also exhibits a dependent relationship with the natural environment that is also connected to the divine. In an appeal to the village priestess, Unoka extols his own goodness by informing her that he makes sacrifices to Ani, the owner of the land, and Ifejioku, the god of yams (1958:16). His acknowledgment of her authority illustrates his awareness of the position she occupies in the triangular relationship of gods, humans and nature. The priestess is the mediator between the subject (Unoka) and the ethereal (the gods). In Unoka's view, his crops cannot grow without her blessing; indirectly, his family is dependent upon her for life and sustenance. This dependency also reflects that of the Christian as reliant on God as sustainer of heaven and earth. Without a doubt, the God of the missionaries is also revered as the creator and sustainer of all that is natural, as is found in the first book of the Christian Bible, Genesis. Genesis reads: "In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth" (1984:1). The very same chapter also informs us that: "God said, let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit of its kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth" (1984:1). Here, the god spoken of in the Christian Bible is not only portrayed as the initial seer of earth, but also as the force that originally gave it life. The Africans, as portrayed in *Things Fall Apart*, had a similar, dependant relationship with the sustainers of their spiritual cosmos. Like the meanings and sets of symbols Christians derive from their holy book, to facilitate a sense of closeness with their God, the Umuofians possessed their own peculiar system of signs and codes, utilised to commune with the divine. This religious function is fulfilled in *Things Fall Apart* via the New Yam Festival, which was seen as "an occasion for giving thanks to Ani, the earth goddess and the source of all fertility" (1958:32). Perhaps, Achebe is intentionally emphasising the Umuofian, reverent view of the cosmos.

Ani played a greater part in the life of the people than any other deity. She was the ultimate judge of morality and conduct. And what was more, she was in close communion with the departed

fathers of the clan whose bodies had been committed to the earth
(1958:32).

Conflictingly, Achebe's depiction of the Umuofian reverence of this god does not bear a resemblance to Conrad's depiction of Africans as thoughtless savages. If Achebe was attempting to re-paint the relationships Africans had with the ethereal, I applaud his success in negating racist images of African people. According to Gikandi, Achebe's imaginary constructions "[point] to the values that govern [African] society; signs are already posited as ideological symbolisations of a cultural order and its spirit of things" (1991:32). Without a doubt, the signs and symbols of Umuofian culture seek to provide the same balanced relationship with the natural world and cosmos, as Christianity was supposed to do for its followers.

"The Feast of the New Yam was held every year before the harvest began, to honour the earth goddess and the ancestral spirits of the clan" (1958:32). As evidence of unique cultural codes by which the Umuofians lived, we discover that: "New yams could not be eaten unless some had first been offered to these powers" (1958:32). In offering yams to their god, the Umuofians fulfill the following functions. Firstly, they acknowledge the role that a greater force plays in the relationship with the earth. Secondly, in acts of sacrifice and celebration, the collective identity of the village (in connection with Ani) is re-established and affirmed. Surely, these acts of devotion embody the same spiritual traits as those of the ancient Israelites, the adopted fore-fathers of the colonisers. "And they came, every one whose heart stirred him up, and every one whose spirit made him willing, and they brought the Lord's offering to the work of the tabernacle" (1984:60). Like the Umuofians, the ancient Israelites also offered their sacrifices as a community; this was a symbol of their devotion to their god.

Though we have scrutinised what may be labeled similarities in relationship between Umuofian and Christian homage-behaviour, we have still not determined why these forms clashed in *Things Fall Apart*. According to Krishnamurti's form of philosophising, due to the fact that the Umuofians and the Europeans were skeptical about each other's

world-view or life-perspectives, it was inevitable that tension and conflict would arise between them. The very moment when human beings mentally construct what they perceive as a *difference* between themselves or another ‘group,’ there must exist a barrier to understanding. This is why Krishnamurti states that “[in] our relationship with another, we will see that it [relationship] is a process of isolation” (1992:10). Though humans openly flaunt what they uphold as the sacred, within the mental spheres of these sacred declarations exist ideas which have the potential to conflict with those who differ in external forms of worship, spiritual signaling or utterance. Hence, as Krishnamurti reasons:

If we look into our lives and observe relationship, we see it is a process of building resistance against another, a wall over which we look and observe the other; but we always retain the wall and remain behind it, whether it be a psychological wall, a material wall, an economic wall, or a national wall. As long as we live in isolation, behind a wall, there is no relationship with another (1992:10).

In contemporary South Africa, it might be considered blasphemous to speak of diversity as a cause for conflict or misery. It is not the intention of this research project to calculatedly suggest this idea. Instead, *Things Fall Apart* (via Krishnamurti’s angle) coerces us to question the extent to which we believe our ideas of diversity lead to actual, visible and functional unity. Is diversity actually leading to unity, to the end of poverty and suffering? Perhaps, the behaviour and relationships found in *Things Fall Apart* will shed light on our own questions and realities.

An aspect of ‘religious’ life is the acknowledgment of symbols. Like the cross, which is a divine symbol to the Christians, so was the python to the Umuofians. “The royal python was the most revered animal in Mbanta and all the surrounding clans. It was addressed as ‘Our Father’, and was allowed to go wherever it chose, even into people’s beds” (1958:139). As a living symbol, the python was a reminder to many people of the link with the cosmos and their natural environment. It was revered to the extent that “if a

clansman killed a royal python accidentally, he made sacrifices of atonement and performed an expensive burial ceremony such as was done for a great man” (1958:139). Using this symbol as a catalyst for potential conflict between Christianity and an indigenous, Umuofian mind-set, Achebe notifies us that a former outcast (Osu): “brought the church into serious conflict with the clan a year later by killing the sacred python, the emanation of the god of water” (1958:139). Here, the scornful attitude towards the python sheds light on the following: firstly, the separation between the two faiths (noted by the polarised views of the python) caused disrespect or a form of arrogance between Christians and the indigenous believers. This arrogance was displayed in the behaviour of the Christian man towards the symbolic python. Whereas before, he himself was aware of the crucial role the python played in Umuofia, in this particular moment, his zeal towards his new religion was the drive towards his act. In aligning himself with the Christian religion, and perceiving the traditional way of life as heathen-like, the man’s new identity coerces him to turn upon what was formerly familiar to him. He becomes separated from his clansmen due to religion. In Krishnamurti’s view: “As long as there is separation between you and the tree, between you and me, and between you and your neighbour...there must be conflict. Separation means conflict, that is very simple” (1973:193).

An example of conflict as a result of separation due to spiritual belief occurs after the killing of the python:

The spirit of war was upon [the Umuofians]. Okonkwo, who had begun to [re-]play a part in the affairs of his motherland, said that until the abominable gang was chased out of the village with whips there would be no peace (1958:139).

As Krishnamurti suggested, conflict and tension were bound to arise between antagonistic factions, which perceive themselves as different compared to each other (1973:21). In his view, religious thoughts and identity are also related to constructed

images and symbols within the human mind. He says, “the conflict is between these... images, and as long as these images [or symbols] exist there must be conflict” (1992:73). Because we, as human beings, place such seriousness and great value to our spiritual symbols, they have lead to wars and contemporary calamities amongst the nations. Let us clarify this notion by referring to Krishnamurti’s own enunciation.

If you have no image about me and I have no image about you,
then we [may] meet [and understand each other].

But if you insist that I am a foreigner and you are a dogmatic
Hindu soaked in tradition, well it, [the psychological meeting and understanding]
becomes impossible. (1992:73).

As in *Things Fall Apart*, both the Europeans and the Umuofians had constructed images of each other, based upon their tradition, political upbringings and conditioning. The Europeans perceived the Umuofians as uncultured heathens who had no relationship with a supreme-being or divinity. The Umuofians, in turn, viewed the Europeans (and their followers) as aggressors, who not only sought to blasphemously insult their gods, ancestors and tradition, but simultaneously, desired to take over their land, government and access to natural resources. Supportive of the forces behind these supposedly conflicting ideas (East and West), exist the words and ideas which form the initial battles, before the two ‘groups’ truly engaged in physical war. As Krishnamurti says: “We are slaves to words, as we are slaves to images, to symbols. The word, the symbol, is not the actuality, and to find the actuality, see the actuality, one must be free of the symbol” (1992:73). Ironically, Okonkwo is “frustrated by his fellow elders who insist on talking the problem over without acting immediately” (1979:120). In the name of the gods, or a god, both the Africans and Europeans were prepared to fight for what they believed to be causes sanctioned by the divine.

We discover that the clash of philosophies not only created tension between two newly-met groups, but amongst the indigenous people themselves. Solomon Iyasere confirms this existence of inter-African tension when he draws our attention to the fact that: “the

new language [introduced via the missionaries and colonialists] ... allow[ed] [the] previously unspoken and unheard, and therefore unrecognized divisions in the clan to be voiced" (1978:121). As Christianity began to take root in Africa, its followers and those aware of its teaching began to see their worlds in new dimensions. They began to question the powers that be, as the new religion introduced them to a god which spoke of equality amongst mankind. Krishnamurti views this awakening as a result of individuals' under-going a process of self-questioning. He says that "the question of self-knowledge lies in the unfolding of relationship, whether to things, people, or to ideas" (1992:17). Once the new religion allowed the common Umuofians to perceive themselves via lenses that were not controlled by their political elite, they were freed to form their own identities. No longer was the traditional stronghold "a means of covering up [their] own insufficiency, [their] ... troubles, our [their] uncertainty" (1992:17), as Krishnamurti perceives the miss-use of religion. Instead of accepting established patterns of living as immutable, the new way of life afforded the Umuofians the opportunity to explore aspects of themselves that they might have feared to open up to and previously encounter.

The reaction of the villagers to the killing of the holy python allows insight into the very direct challenges the teachings of the missionaries posed. Not every one, like Okonkwo, felt a need to become violent and seek vengeance. The individual response does not equate that of the collective. As Achebe writes, "there were many others who saw the situation differently, and it was their [more peaceful] counsel that prevailed in the end" (1958:140). The voice of the village, as the collective, over-powered Okonkwo's violent response. "It is not a custom to fight for our gods," (1958:140) a member says, possibly representing a sign of reconciliation. Referring to the act of intervening between the gods and an individual, this man suggests that: "if we put ourselves between the god and his victim we may receive blows intended for the offender" (1958:14). Though this utterance may seem like a humble or noble suggestion, it could also indicate that within the fabric of Umuofian society were values which separated the fate of the individual from the communal. That is, when a man or woman commits a wrong-doing, it rests within the individual's hands to ratify the act with the cosmos. Yet, within a political context, this very sense of freedom leaves room for individual initiatives which might harm the

collective community. The previously discussed act of killing the python was a direct assault upon the whole community, and not restrictively against the gods. Did the Umuofians perceive a separation between their execution of justice and that of the gods? By not executing justice upon the man, this could be the case. Why did this chasm exist and should the ancestors, as intermediaries between gods and humans, not have interceded? My suggestion is that though the prevailing opinion of the community was to allow the man to be judged by the gods, in a broader, political context, it signifies a reluctance of the masses to intervene where crucial issues relate directly to themselves.

Okonkwo, on the other hand, as a symbol of fierce African resistance to colonialism on the physical and spiritual planes, objects to the reaction of the majority to the blatant disrespect and disdain for the royal python. “Let us not reason like cowards” (1958:140), he implores his fellow tribe’s folk. Voicing his views against the majority, he pleads with the authoritative council to consider the following:

If a man comes into my hut and defecates on the floor, what do I do? Do I shut my eyes? No! I take a stick and break his head. That is what a man does. These people [the European and Umuofian Christians] are daily pouring filth over us, and [the authorities of the village say] we should pretend not to see (1958:14).

As we have witnessed previously, Achebe aligns the spirit of rebellion or rejection of the new tradition with a variation of masculinity (as embodied by Okonkwo). As this type of masculinity proved to be destructive in the beginning of the novel (and as suggested by this research project), its ultimate prevalence after Okonkwo’s request raises numerous concerns. As an authority and previous member of the elite, Okonkwo has great influence in his community’s decisions. What he and the elders decide impact upon the lives of all Umuofians. The concurrence of the council of elders with Okonkwo’s view further supported his suggestion for action.

‘Okonkwo has spoken *the truth* [emphasis added],’ said another

man 'We should do something. But let us ostracise these men. We would then not be held accountable for their abominations (1958:140).

In this scenario, Achebe may be suggesting the following. The Umuofians were truly dumbfounded at the challenges thrown upon them by the new culture. They were placed in a state of anger and resentment at the slaying of the python and the conversion of new Christians. As Achebe writes, the actions of the Christians were seen as abominations. In confronting such heinous acts, they were tempted to react out of fear and the zeal to defend their spiritual symbols. These two negative facets, according to Krishnamurti, result from the human act of non-rationally clinging to religious thoughts and emblems. He says:

When you want experience in the religious field, you want it because you have not solved your problems, your daily anxieties, despairs, fears and sorrows, therefore you want something more. In that demand for more lies deception (1973:92).

Okonkwo's violent reaction to the slaying of the python illustrates the above theory. His village and tradition were being threatened. In his clinging to a threatened culture, fear and sorrow overcame him, resulting in his urge to commit violence.

Inter-African Identity

The status of the 'Osu' amongst the Umuofians illustrates an example of pre-colonial social constructs, where the Umuofians, in perceiving differences amongst African people, enforced separation. The 'Osu' group was banned from daily existence amongst the villagers. As explained by a member of these rejected individuals, an Osu was:

A taboo forever, and his children after him. He could neither marry nor be married by the free-born. He was in fact an outcast, living in

a special area of the village, close to the Great Shrine. Wherever he went he carried with him the mark of his forbidden cast --- long, tangled and dirty hair...an Osu could not attend an assembly of the free-born, and they, in turn, could not shelter under his roof (1958:138).

These values existed before the coming of the Europeans. Yet, when we inspect the Umuofian attempt to cope with the perceived differences between their religion and that of the Europeans, we detect that they display a similar, fearful reaction as they do towards the Osu. As pointed out by Krishnamurti, their manner of isolating or distancing themselves from the Osu is a result of fearing and misunderstanding leprosy (1973:1992). As evidence of this collective resort to isolation of peoples as solutions to challenges, we read that: "Everybody in the assembly spoke, and in the end it was decided to ostracise the Christians" (1958:140). Many years of acculturation had not prepared the Umuofians to accept challenges to established patterns of authority or their cultural life. This could also be due to the fact that there was a great miss-trust towards the Europeans. Gordan informs us that:

As far as the Africans were concerned, the missionaries and the colonialists were birds of a feather. After all, they shared a common world-view and a common racist perception of the African. The missionaries tolerated and even practiced racial discrimination to the extent of providing separate entries and sections in sanctuaries" (1996:287).

Was there an alternative for the village council, other than attempting to quarantine the new culture? My view is that there must have been, but the leadership of the Umuofians, in attacking and attempting to ostracise the Christians, refused to acknowledge the existence of this new, spiritual path. Their ancient way of living had thwarted their ability to react critically or less defensively towards it. Contrary to the Umuofian attempt to isolate the Christians, Krishnamurti suggests that spontaneous thinking in such intense situations is required. "To be spontaneous," he proposes, "means you have never been

conditioned, you are not reacting,” (1992:73). Clearly, in attempting to ostracise the Christians, the Umuofians are not reacting critically in dealing with the challenge at hand. There is no presence of emotion or love, which would attempt to understand why Christians behave or reason in their particular style. Hence, spontaneous action would indicate that one is “not being influenced” (1992:73) by one’s conditioning. In acting spontaneously, it would mean “that... you are really a free human being, without anger, hatred, without having a purpose in view” (1992:73). Likewise, when the council of elders, in its state of derision, accepts Okonkwo’s position and suggestion, it exhibits action based upon anger, fear or confusion. It has not rationally considered the inner values of Christianity. Such logic would involve: “the understanding of the superficial consciousness, but also the deeper layers of consciousness, because,” according to Krishnamurti, “all consciousness is behaviour to a pattern” (1992:73). Everything we do, in his perspective, unless spontaneously carried out, is based upon our conditioning, our patterns of thought and reactions. “Any action within the field of consciousness [what we know] is limited and therefore [it is] not action that is free, spontaneous” (1992:73.) From within the field of the known, motivated by uncertainty and fear, the Umuofians chose to isolate and attack.

What we have determined thus far, is that in pre-colonial Africa (as possibly represented by *Things Fall Apart*), constructions of the ethereal and divine did not leave much room for change in authority structures, and also in thought. It bound the Umuofians, especially as manifested by the defensive behaviour of the authority figures, into patterns of thought which negatively impacted upon the extended community and the unavoidable relationship with the Europeans. Perhaps, if Africans had reacted outside of the paradigms of traditional thought, the encounter with the West might not have been as tragic. Here, I am not deliberately overlooking the brutal practices carried out by the Europeans themselves.

Chapter Three

Krishnamurti and the Transference of Power in *Things Fall Apart*

Up until this juncture in this research project, power has been discussed as an institution which is controlled by an elite group of human beings. Whether African or European, these humans dominate and regulate society in every dimension. These dimensions include the political, economic, agricultural, spiritual and psychological. Though humans are the agents whereby power exhibits its various forms amongst the masses, power does not necessarily cling to a specific group or form. What I am asserting is that power transcends notions of 'race,' political or economical persuasion. Due to competition from amongst these various sectors, it may shift from one group to another. When a particular group gains political or spiritual influence over the masses, power perpetuates its form through imitation or repetition of behaviour dictated by the prevailing group. In *Things Fall Apart*, power is not only revealed via its contention by the elite of the Umuofians and colonisers. Instead, the adoption and various responses of the villagers to the new way of life confirm the *transferring nature* of power. This contention is significant to our analysis. As King suggests: "In *Things Fall Part*, we had the voice of the community...still supreme as law or at least as 'conscience' (1975:161). If the communal opinion was capable of being swayed, so much easier would it be for the competing forces to achieve their aims.

Once the title holders, the elders and Chielo herself begin to lose their influence over the masses of the Umuofians, power is *transferred* from the traditional African institutions to those of the colonial West. The genesis of western Christianity and mercantile practice in Umuofia presented the masses with an *alternative pattern* of thinking and living. According to Carroll, "this is how Christianity makes its inroads in the novel. Not by a frontal attack, backed by the colonising forces, but by [the individual and collective response] to a need so deeply felt that it has not been clearly formulated" (1990:53). Whereas for centuries, older and wealthy men (with the exception of the priestess in Umuofia) ruled the spiritual and temporal planes, the

masses had no alternative of outlook. They were conditioned to accept these world-views through fear, passivity, or pure uncertainty. As Gikandi writes: “What we are dealing with here is not merely a re-enactment of the past, although the novel is often read as such, but a discourse on the nature of history and its meaning to the people who live it” (1991:29). What is significant to Gikandi and this study is the meaning of tradition to the masses, and how it impacts upon towards the new. As we see in *Things Fall Apart*, when the colonialists entered Umuofia, an endless array of possibilities was presented to the masses, which up until that point, restricted themselves to a particular world-view.

In my estimation, Nwoye, the son of Okonkwo, is a literary symbol of power’s transferring nature and ability. In Okonkwo’s clan it is he who decides to think outside of the traditional pattern of thinking, and allow the possibilities in life, presented by the new philosophy of the Christian faith, to entice his mind. As Achebe writes, he was “captivated” (1958:128) by the presentation of the new awareness. In fact:

It was not the mad logic of the Trinity that captivated him. He did not understand it. It was the poetry of the new religion, something felt in the marrow (1958:128-9).

Poetry is associated with the human expression of the aesthetic. The aesthetic sphere appeals to our sense of beauty, where the natural or meta-physical blend emotionally together. Nwoye’s attraction to the poetic language of the missionaries reveals that, outside of denominational, cultural or political constructions, the aesthetic still transcends these very barriers. Though the newcomers spoke of ideas which were incomprehensible to him, he was emotionally capable of feeling and connecting with the tongue spoken. “The hymn about brothers who sat in darkness and in *fear* [emphasis added] 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” (1959:130). Though Nwoye’s inner-contemplation is

being addressed, I suggest that Achebe as the historian might be imploring us to consider the following. Is it necessary to live according to strict spiritual and cultural precedents? Nwoye's questions related to such crucial matters within his community, which were matters of life or death. Twins were discarded, as were slaves adopted and 'other' tribes killed. Even Okonkwo, who was the embodiment of masculine power and traditional loyalty, reveals weaknesses when he is required to kill his adopted son; it was the law of his clan. As related to Okonkwo by Ezeudu:

Umuofia [had] decided to kill him. The Oracle of the hills and Caves [had] pronounced it. They [would] take him [Ikefumena] outside of Umuofia as required and kill him there (1958:50).

These commands or decrees were not instructed by voices in the wind or utterances of fairies in the sky. They resulted from very real human interpretations, or 'systems,' as Krishnamurti calls it: "A system," he explained, "implies practice, following, repetition, changing 'what actually is' and therefore increasing...conflict" (1973:95-6). The community and Okonkwo were faced with the conflict of having to kill his adopted son, Ikefumene. Yet, remaining within a system of thought, as illustrated by Krishnamurti, there was no choice but to carry out the murder of a young boy. This is the realisation of conflict. It is likely that Chielo, the priestess of the clan, interpreted these commandments and conveyed them to the village council. No matter how much Okonkwo loved his adopted son, he had no choice but to accept the commands of his elders and the spiritual elite. What we discern is that love is over-powered by traditional statutes. Even Ezeudu, who conveys the instruction to Okonkwo, acknowledges the harshness of the act when he tells Okonkwo, "I want you to do nothing with it. He calls you his father" (1958:50). The ending of a bond between a parent and child is embodied with the severance of Ikefumene's life. Okonkwo's buckling to this pattern of thinking, or his reserved bowing to his authorities, is illustrated in the act of the killing. "As the man...raised his machete, Okonkwo looked away. He heard the blow" (1958:53). Though social constructions and conditioning demanded that his son's life be ended, even he (as the epitome of

masculinity) had to cringe before its extremity. Evidence of this cultural calamity is expressed when Okonkwo partakes in his son's murder. "Dazed with *fear* [emphasis added], Okonkwo drew his machete and cut him down. He was *afraid* [emphasis added] of being thought weak" (1958:54). Being confused and in a state of fear, Okonkwo chose to uphold the traditional pattern of action, instead of acknowledging the love in his heart. After the heinous act, he "did not taste any food for two days...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" (1958:55). The taking up of wine might represent the extent to which the destructive effect of adhering to a cultural statute, when it violates the persuasion of the heart, devastated Okonkwo and his household.

Hence, in direct opposition to his father's strict adherence to ancient laws upheld by the clan's spiritual leaders, Nwoye acknowledged the warmth and compassion in his heart, by attempting to understand the appeal which the new way of life had for many of his fellow villagers. In being less violent and open-minded to information from the cultural other, Nwoye symbolically acts as a transferring agent of power. Within his understanding, the ideas manifested to him by the Christian faith had relevance and impact upon his psyche. Irregardless of the intent of the missionaries, Nwoye's interpretation and eventual assimilation of the new mode of living propelled the transfer of power (even if limited) from the indigenous realm to that of the West. It is vital that we recognise this transition to be the outcome of an individual and not a political or authoritarian mandate.

He [Nwoye] felt a relief within as the hymn poured into his parched soul. The words of the hymn were like the drops of frozen rain melting on the dry palate of the panting earth. Nwoye's callow mind was greatly puzzled (1958:129).

Why was Nwoye's soul referred to as parched? Though we cannot draw any conclusions, we may deduce that the introduction of Christian patterns of thinking,

such as perceiving heaven as a place for all humans, relieved Nwoye of the restrictions placed upon him by his inherited culture. Achebe's reference to Nwoye's soul as a 'dry palate' indicates a vessel in need of fulfillment and nurturing. The cultural norms of Umuofia were no longer sufficient to satisfy the needs of all; new horizons were introduced with the advent of Christianity. Through the eyes of the new religion, certain individuals were able to see themselves and their families rising above peasantry into new possibilities.

Indigenous Culture Challenged

European missionaries found willing souls in their quest to convert thinkers from one mental pattern to another. As an example of this, Nwoye, in considering Christianity, rebels against the constructions of his community. Likewise, the masses – in seeing the restrictiveness of social constructions in their own culture – reject patterns of thinking and transfer their acknowledgement of power from an indigenous context, into a Christian design. Illustrating this disintegration and transference of power from the control of the political and spiritual elite of Umuofia is when the missionaries request permission to establish a physical base, a church. “It was not easy [for them to get] the *men* [emphasis added] of high title and the elders together” (1958:130). The permission to open a church, in my view, represents the attempt to establish a symbol of the new way of life within the space of the traditional ground. Gikandi acknowledges the pivotal role spiritual and cultural symbols (such as the church, python and the Oracle) play in Achebe's method of establishing cultural gist. According to Gikandi: “The Igbo world which Achebe seeks to represent in this novel are dependant upon certain signs and images, a collection of social codes and signs, which are central to the development of meanings in *Things Fall Apart*” (1991:32). The elite decide to assign the newcomers a portion of land for their church in the symbolically ‘evil forest.’

In it were buried all those who died of the really evil diseases, like leprosy and small pox. It was also the dumping ground for the potent fetishes of

great medicine-men when they died. An 'evil forest' was, therefore, alive with sinister forces and powers of darkness (1958:130).

On the spiritual and political planes, the allocation of land could be seen as an attack or offensive act upon the newcomers by the Mbanta elite. No one from Umuofia would dare set foot in this terrain; within this pattern of thinking, it would be deadly and futile. Uchendu, a representative of the elite, declares: "They [the Christians] boast about victory over death. Let us give them a *real* [emphasis added] battlefield in which to show their victory [by throwing them amongst evil spirits and forces]" (1958:131). Within this blueprint of thinking, no person could survive in the forest. Ironically, the failure of this myth *pre-empts the further transference of power* from the indigenous elite to the missionaries.

"The next morning the crazy men [the missionaries] actually began to clear a part of the forest and to build their house" (1958:131). Here, Achebe, in emphasising the perception of the indigenous prototype of thinking – describes the missionaries as 'crazy.' They were crazy for daring to negate a myth which declared the evil forest as lethal. "The inhabitants of Mbanta expected them all [the missionaries] to be dead within four days" (1958:131). What unfolds is that, not only was it the elite who anticipated the demise of the Christians in the evil forest, but also the masses of inhabitants. The villagers, who had been conditioned by their tradition to think in a certain way, actually expected the missionaries to die; so powerful was the influence of human and metaphysical constructions over them. Eventually, the 'white' man did not pass away in the evil forest. He was not assailed, victimised or devoured by evil spirits. Instead, the traditional pattern of thinking crumbled before the face of the Umuofian elite. "Every one was puzzled" (1958:131) at the survival of the missionaries. "The villagers were so certain about the doom that awaited these men that one or two converts thought it wise to suspend their allegiance to the new faith" (1958:132). Instead the missionaries accomplished the supposed impossible.

It became known that the white man's fetish had unbelievable

power. It was said that he wore glasses on his eyes so that he could see and talk to evil spirits. Not long after, he won his first three converts (1958:131).

In the discrediting of Umuofian philosophy, by surviving in the evil forest, the missionaries were the *recipients of power*. Power was transferred by the winning of human converts. It was also transferred in the process of challenging and defeating Umuofian social constructions which for centuries barred its members from exploring a piece of land through the instillation of fear. For a long time, the villagers were scared of going near the 'evil forest,' yet, in a matter of less than four days, this philosophy tumbled down. In fact, seeing through the fallacy of ancient myths, the Umuofians gained a sense of enlightenment. "So," says Krishnamurti, "the mind has to find out whether the brain cells, which have developed through millennia, can be totally quiet, and respond to a dimension they do not know" (1973:96-7). This quietness is sought in the quest to avoid "living in the past, within the field of...conditioning" (1973:96). The Umuofians, in the process of introspection (as recommended by Krishnamurti above) responded to mental dimensions which they previously did not know.

Why, then, would Achebe allow this illustration of the discovery of the falseness behind a myth? Would this not defeat his described role, as enunciated by Gikandi and many others, as historian? I do not believe so; instead, I am of the viewpoint that Achebe desires to remind his readers that there existed gaps within the indigenous, African cultural landscape which might have been harmful to the greater community. Perhaps, Achebe is making a social suggestion in his capacity as writer. "For Achebe, the African novelist as teacher has three primary functions in relation to his society: as historian, rescuing its past; as a critic; analysing its present; as mentor, helping to guide it towards its future" (1991:4). By depicting a scene, in which centuries of thought is set ablaze, Achebe might be beseeching us to open our minds, and not allow social-constructs (within the mind) the ability to limit our growth as a continent. Clearly, a belief such as the one mutilated by the Christian's survival in the

forest, aids in the process whereby humans become trapped in a system of thought; a system which is binding and limiting to mental expansion.

Like the collective realm, which saw the alteration of opinion towards Christianity and the missionaries (after their survival in the forest), so was power transferred on the individual sphere. When Nwoye accepts Christianity as his way of life, and rejects his father's curses, he exemplifies signs of a personal conversion of power – from the indigenous to the western. This conversion was not graceful, as Okonkwo (a representative of the indigenous elite), resists his son's spiritual shifting to the new faith. Okonkwo's resistance to the loss of power and influence is expressed in the form of violence. Upon learning of his son's mingling with the Christians, he shouted and, "seized a heavy stick that lay on the dwarf wall and hit [Nwoye] two or three savage blows" (1958:133). As an agent of traditional power, *Okonkwo rebels against the transfer of strength* from his heritage to the newcomers. Here, power reveals an aspect of its nature – it will be violent when threatened. It will also divide father from son, mother from daughter, if the pairs are on opposite ends of political or spiritual spectrums. Later in the evening, "a sudden fury rose within [Okonkwo] and he felt a strong desire to take up his machete, go to the church and wipe out the entire vile and corrupt gang. But on further thought he told himself that Nwoye was not worth fighting for" (1958:134). Because Okonkwo remained steadfast in accepting his traditional world-view, and refused to comprehend the new, he disowned his son – his own flesh. Within the context of the family and personal domain, power separates man from man. When religion or culture acts as a wall, it prohibits understanding and communication.

Nwoye, regardless of his father's violent rebellion, continues the transference of power. In fact, in his acceptance of a new pattern or mode of thinking, he chooses to explore even further the possibilities that the new way of life might offer. After enduring his father's abuse, "he went back to the church and told Mr. Kiaga that he had decided to go to Umuofia, where the white missionary had set up a school to teach young Christians to read and write" (1958:133). Psychologically, Nwoye's

desire to expand his world-view (as exemplified by his want of literary and written skills) may be labeled as innovational. This urge to innovate or develop his inner-self was a direct result of new opportunities offered by Christianity. Nwoye was driven for a need to experience or create something new from his life; something that was not limiting, as he perceived the traditions of his heritage to be. According to Erik Erikson, innovative personalities have a need for “autonomy and order, self-understanding that enables them to empathise with others, a high need for nurturance, and a concern for the welfare of others as well as for their own well-being” (1979:91). I believe Nwoye’s characterisation reflects this personality type. His father, Okonkwo, was extremely authoritarian and did not permit the inner-expressions of individuality from his son. Furthermore, the culture in Umuofia did not fulfill Nwoye’s quest to understand himself and his relationship with others around him. To Krishnamurti, such relationships are vital. In his words, “human relationship is one of the most radical, basic, essential things that we have to find out about, because from that we may find out for ourselves what love is, not what we have made of it” (1992:123).

Erik Erikson, in theorising about the development of young adults (adolescents), supplements Krishnamurti’s value of nurturance when he states that:

Young adults need and want intimacy; that is, they need to make deep personal commitments to others. If they are unable or afraid to do this, they may become isolated and self-absorbed (1978:47).

If we apply this view point to Nwoye’s growth as a young man, it is sensible to see why the new faith fascinated him. Okonkwo’s persona and type of behaviour allowed no true intimacy between himself and his extended family. Okonkwo’s violence alienated Nwoye into a state of isolation. In seeking to distance himself from his father, by detecting their differences, Nwoye sought consolation elsewhere (with the Christians). In the act of this distancing, *power is further transferred* from the

indigenous to the western realm. There is no notion of race or ethnicity at the core of this movement of power. It was initiated within the psychological state, and eventual choices, of a young individual.

Daniel Levison's theoretical sketching of a human 'life structure' is also useful in our attempt to gauge Nwoye's upbringing and relationship to his father. It brings to light the crucial features of adolescence and a young human's psychological entrance into the established patterns of her/his social world.

This [adolescent stage] is an evolving framework that shapes and is shaped by a person's relationship with the environment. The life structure has both external and internal aspects. It includes the people, places, institutions, things, and causes that a person finds most important, as well as the values, dreams, and emotions that make them so (1978:450).

As power transferred itself, while harnessing Nwoye as a human agent, it touched upon each of the facets of human activity delineated by Levinson. In fact, the church as an institution in *Things Fall Apart* played a vital role in providing solace for the isolated Nwoye. Before joining the converts, "Nwoye passed and re-passed the little red-earth and thatch building without summoning enough courage to enter" (1958:132). His apparent desire to enter this significant space is thwarted by fear or apprehension, yet within the church revolves an energy which entices the young man. "He heard the voice of singing and *although it came from a handful of men* [emphasis added] it was loud and confident" (1958:132). I am of the persuasion that Achebe stressed the fact that men were singing for a purpose. Up until that stage in Nwoye's life, he was coerced into living with an example of manhood which was harsh, rough and partook in violence or pain. Yet here, in the Christian church, were men who reflected Nwoye's own inner nature. They exuded softness and gentility. These are characteristics which Krishnamurti believes are instrumental in achieving an increased state of consciousness. Such a state of perception is able to: "[see] the whole of life as a unit, as a unitary movement, not fragmented. Therefore, such a

mind acts totally, not fragmentarily, because it acts out of complete stillness” (1973:97). Nwoye’s appreciation of his mother’s stories, as described earlier, is a reminder of this gentility and desire for gentleness. Hence, Nwoye was attracted to what he sensed as fulfillments of his inner-needs, as discovered in the midst of the new religion and pattern of thinking. It might be that when Nwoye linked with the Christians, that this was the genesis of a process in which he began to discover who he truly was, outside of the overbearing demeanour of Okonkwo. Krishnamurti agrees:

The understanding of what you are, whatever it be – ugly or beautiful, wicked or mischievous – the understanding of what you are, without distortion, is the beginning of virtue. Virtue is essential, for it gives freedom. It is only in virtue that you can discover, that you can live (1964:23).

As Nwoye freed himself from his previous way of life, he had greater freedom to pursue what he felt to be truthful or virtuous living. No longer restrained from exploring sentiments which his father abhorred, new horizons were opened before him.

Chapter Four

Krishnamurti and the Emergence of New Power Forms in *Things Fall Apart*

The emergence of colonial forces in Africa was an overwhelming process which drastically and painfully affected the lives of millions. Ayittey's assertion that: "colonialism in Africa constituted an imposition of alien rule on the people of Africa, under which they were subjected to degrading acts of human rights abuses and political oppression," (1991:407) is valid. It has never been the intent of this project to deny this harsh reality. What I have attempted to demonstrate is that when Africans adopted aspects of the way of life introduced to them by Europe, the amalgamation with their inherited traditions produced a unique and never-before-seen lifestyle in the continent. Like Okonkwo's son, Nwoye, many Africans felt liberated in the sense of being offered an alternative way of life to what previously had appeared as eternal. The modern emergence of Christian denominations such as the African Methodist Episcopal church and African Zionist congregations, as found in South Africa, are examples of new, African interpretations of Christianity, as introduced by the West. Harper concurs when he notes puts forth that: "African traditions have never shunned change per se. To the contrary, change has become institutionalised, and lies at the core of all ritualistic revival" (1996:109).

In the novel, Obierka, an old friend of Okonkwo, informs him of the chasm which has developed between their traditional outlook of life, and the acceptance of Christianity by many Umuofians. He says:

The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers and our clan no longer act[s] like one (1958:156).

Though this allegiance to the white man appears to be a source of remorse to the two friends, it stresses the symbolic will of the common villager to break away from the

hold of indigenous authority, in order to embrace the new. Harrow's perspective of the nature of *change* is useful in dissecting these moments of transition in *Things Fall Apart*. Harrow believes that: "change occurs around points of destabilisation" (1994:6). The stronghold of traditional, African society was destabilised upon encountering the west, and presented an axis whereby change could occur. In this particular axis emerge uncertainties on the part of the affected group. Due to these uncertainties, upon the cultural or spiritual levels, the historic present becomes a destabilised reference point of identity for the affected group, further prompting the external force of change to permeate through the society (1994:6). It was this destabilisation of his society, which enraged Okonkwo.

Linking Krishnamurti to this notion of the meeting between Africa and the West as a moment of destabilisation, we consider his views on order and disorder. He declares that:

Out of disorder comes order, and it comes about naturally, freely, easily, with great beauty and vitality, when you are directly in contact with disorder in yourself. You are not in contact with this disorder directly, with yourself, if you do not know how to look at yourself (1973:212).

It is my perspective that Okonkwo could not come to terms with himself in the face of the growth of the new culture in his midst. It produced disorder in his personality and in the community which could not be resolved due to his refusal to adjust to the new. Obierka also acknowledges the extent to which the new spiritual force and culture had diminished traces of stabilisation in their village. He concedes that those in positions of authority had not taken the new culture seriously enough. By remaining insulated from the introduction of new ideas and thought systems, they found themselves on the outer parameter of the community, which had begun the process of adjusting to the co-habitation of new symbols and beliefs. Hence, as articulated by Ojinmah: "Achebe [might have believed] that the dawn of colonialism rendered

Okonkwo's [spiritual and political] type as functionally redundant" (1991:23). Whereas the time-honoured culture upheld and praised the materially prosperous and physically strong character-types, such as Okonkwo, these are the very models Achebe uses as symbols of indigenous decline.

The community had overcome fear of authority and fears within themselves, which previously halted them from questioning the norms by which they lived their lives. Krishnamurti describes this psychological resistance to change as partially a result of:

The uncertainty of life - the fear of the unknown, the lack of security in [the] ever-changing world. [Perhaps it] is...the insecurity of relationship [and] the immensity of life, and not understanding it (1970:100).

So, the values and norms found in the web of indigenous culture fulfilled a functional role but they also "created a regime of meanings which [gave] its members insight into their conditions of existence, and yet this insight [was] achieved through omission or a certain kind of *blindness* [emphasis added]" (Gikandi: 1991:34). The Umoufians accepted certain myths from their tradition because these afforded them a sense of balance pertaining to the unknown. Yet, when they were dispelled, Christianity occupied the empty space left via their dissipation.

My view is that Africans, like those villagers in *Things Fall Apart*, regardless of any noble link that Achebe or any contemporary leader of our time attempts to make with 'African' culture or tradition, were bound to a spiritual and political system that perpetuated the existence of a distinct status quo. The majority of African people chose to accept this conditioning. Gikandi stresses: "There is no doubt that before 'things fall apart' in Umuofia, the circle of culture is shown to have ideological value because it represents the ideal, or possibly, the illusion, of completeness and identity" (1991:34). We then discern that pre-colonial Umuofia was not as united or cohesive

as we ideally tend to picture this society. As Gikandi appears to suggest, the perceived unity could have been existed on weak or superficial levels.

In relationship to the demise of the African elite's hold on the thought-patterns of the masses, and in the strengthening of the hold of this mental sphere by the new-colonial and spiritual government, I agree with Gikandi's perspective of the Osu, in terms of the transference of authority, influence and power. Gikandi believes that, "those people who were excluded from [the traditional, cultural circle] because they were not considered to be full members of the community, [became] the coloniser's weapon of exposing the contradictions which Umuofia sought to repress" (1991:35). In this proposition, the African is seen as a weapon in the hands of the imperialists, used against the longevity of indigenous society. Though a weapon is an object to use, I would add that the Africans consciously chose to rebel against their cultural past. The Osu, though cast aside by spiritual decree in Umuofia, accepted Christianity for reasons other than to criticise the African heritage.

Whereas the Umuofians looked upon the Osu with scorn or malice, the new way of life provided them with psychological relief and acceptance. This acceptance and sense of belonging are crucial needs that all humans desire to have fulfilled. Christianity's message of brotherhood appealed to African outcasts. In Umuofia, the Osu, by virtue of being labeled as different, never received this fulfillment or sensation of family. Speaking of character and psychological development, Erikson highlights the importance of individual identity and its connected-ness to an extended group. "Here, the term identity points to an individual's *link* [emphasis added] with the unique values, fostered by a unique history, of [his/her] people" (1959:109). Within the context of this analysis of identity, the Osu underwent psychological oppression as the excluded 'other.' As the narrator proclaims in *Things Fall Apart*, an Osu was: "a thing set *apart* [emphasis added] - a taboo for ever" (1958:138). It was never intended by the traditional and indigenous values of the society, for this group to feel a part of the community, or to achieve a balanced-psychological state of mind.

In the novel, Mr. Kiago's enunciation of Christian theology (in relationship to the equality of humankind) fulfills the process whereby a particular Osu overcomes the cultural stigma placed upon him. Kiago admonishes him:

How are you different from other men who shave their hair?
The same God created you and them. But they have cast you
out like lepers. It is against the will of God, who has promised
everlasting life to all who believe in His holy name (1958:138-9).

These mental propositions touched the core of the listener's soul; for after being looked upon with disparagement for life, Christianity appeared like a precious balm offering solace and healing. The new religion did not appear as a scheme to manipulate African minds with the intent of enforcing a type of mental colonialism. Instead, on a personal level, it offered certain African individuals a healthy alternative to their inherited culture. Ultimately "the two outcasts shaved off their hair, and soon they were among the strongest adherents of the new faith" (1958:139). It is not ironic that those rejected by the indigenous realm were incorporated into that of the colonial. Unlike Okonkwo who "is anything but accommodating and flexible [and] wishes to break the wings of the Christians, not sit down with them" (1996:117) the Osu find a sense of peace which he does not. Okonkwo's clinging to the past, in Harrow's perspective, might be evidence of his being "undone by the very social forces that were responsible for his rise" (1996:116). In clasping on to his traditional past, it is the past itself which became his impetus for destruction. Gikandi writes that, "what we see [is] this...breaking up of a culture but also the fundamental ideology on which it was built – the appeal to unity and totality" (1991:35). As is evident, there was not an across-the-board form of unity amongst the Umuofians. In these gaps of division, new visions of reality emerged – this process further eroded indigenous control in the face of the acceptance of the new faith by the common folk of Umuofia.

The Community Decides

In *Things Fall Apart*, it is apparent that Achebe, as novelist, addresses the communal, Umuofian acceptance and rejection of their acculturation processes. Likewise, Kahari believes that the artistic and literary reflection on pre-colonial reactions to the impact of the arrival of western modes of living is a vital aspect of the African novel. In discussing Shona novels, Kahari explains that “the writer from the start shows us a village community in the process of assimilating a new style of life” (1986:38). He continues: “in this way the novel emphasises certain cultural values which are important in a period of social as well as cultural change, as well as asserting that other values remain unchanged” (1986:38). As a result of this major facet of African writing, factors such as *racism* and competition for natural resources are not the only avenues whereby the colonial encounter, as represented in *Things Fall Apart*, may be scrutinised. There is a hazard in repetitively and restrictively viewing such a crucial stage in Africa’s history through such lenses. In doing so, we assume that the masses of African people always accepted forms of subjugation, and that there were never voices of dissent which questioned their spiritual and political power structures. Nwoye, in questioning the societal values behind the killing of twins and his adopted brother, Ikemefuna, represents a pre-colonial voice where dissatisfaction at the order of things is expressed. Indeed, the very killing of Ikemefuna by Okonkwo marks a symbolic condemnation of peculiar, cultural values. Harrow adds that: “his [Okonkwo’s] nature, like his rank, is inscribed permanently in this moment, and he ceases to confront events in his life with any further potential for change” (1994:122). In the village of Umuofia, there were many individuals like Nwoye who were better equipped to adapt to change. Unlike Okonkwo who limits his own life via an unbalanced view of the meeting between cultures, others prosper and grow.

Legitimising the view that the transference or disintegration of African power (as held by the status quo) should be viewed in terms of European coercion over the masses, Gikandi states: “To understand the narrative techniques which Achebe adopts in

Things Fall Apart, we need to examine the ways in which the colonial tradition represses the African character, African history, and African modes of representation” (1991:27). I agree with Gikandi, we cannot ignore these facets of the colonial encounter in Africa; yet, simultaneously, it is imperative that we equally acknowledge the decisions of those individuals who freely volunteered to experience a new world-view.

Towards the end of *Things Fall Apart*, Okonkwo hosts a feast for his mother’s clan, his host for many years while in exile. During this occasion, an elderly man addresses the attendees and expresses his views about the survival of their people’s heritage. His admonishment was pessimistic; he was critical of the ability of the young to withstand the encroachment of the new philosophy – Christianity and western mercantilism.

I fear for you people [he tells the young] because you do not understand how strong the bond of kinship is. You do not know what it is to speak with one voice. And what is the result? An abominable religion has settled amongst you (1958:147).

The old man acknowledges that the younger generation has ceased to hold on to values which bonded the community in previous times. By not valuing their kinship and the social codes which acted as forms of cohesion for the group, the new way of thinking had permeated their society, as an ‘abomination.’ The old man is a symbol of resistance to change. As a representative of the power-elite, he expresses his dissatisfaction at the transfer of power from the one domain to the next. Yet, could it not be that he and other elders were responsible, in the broader construction of African-political and spiritual institutions, for negating the unity of community? This exclusion might have been produced by limiting access to a few selected individuals, to spaces where decisions were made, wealth was valued, and men prevailed. Krishnamurti suggests that wherever such exclusivity or division exists, there must be tension, confusion or strife. “Without relationship, there is no possibility of existence

in life; and as long as relationship is based on power, on domination, there must be the process of isolation, which inevitably invites conflict” (1992:13). The village council possessed boundaries which made it uncommon for the commoners to equally express their views.

When Okonkwo returns to his village as a fallen hero, he finds a society permanently altered. Achebe’s descriptive language informs us that Umuofia was transformed upon every single level. The clan had undergone such profound change during his exile that it was barely recognisable. The new religion and government and the trading stores were very much in the people’s eyes and minds (1958:161). In his absence, a total revolution had occurred in his hometown. People had readjusted, for better or for worse. The western system, in partially replacing traditional, spiritual, economic and political constructions, had altered the manner in which Africans conducted their relationships with each other. As Roberts suggests: “colonial conditions generated new routes for the circulation of people and ideas; they also fostered new channels of expression” (1990:231). These new avenues of communication no longer demanded that relationships rely solely upon the consent of the ruling elite. As a member of this previous entity, Okonkwo’s perspective was of lamentation; no longer did the form of rule, in which a man’s age, status and achievements earned him an esteemed place in the social hierarchy, exist. Instead, it appeared as if the complete reversal was in effect. Commoners, the masses, were foolishly following the example of foreigners. They no longer respected the gods of their land or the human intermediaries of these deities. Instead of acknowledging the men who, up until that point, had governed Umuofia for centuries, western jurisprudence had become the ruling ideology, and strangers had taken seats of authority.

Okonkwo was deeply grieved. And it was not just a personal grief. He mourned for the clan which he saw breaking up and falling apart, and he mourned for the warlike men of Umuofia who become so unaccountably like women (1958:161).

Unlike Okonkwo's nature, which I have attempted to symbolically align with the pre-colonial image of strength and prosperity, authority and African tradition, the villagers had become, in Okonkwo's view, effeminate. I believe that Achebe deliberately uses this derogatory perspective of femininity to underline a malignant and masculine view of the world, as possibly illustrated by Okonkwo's persona. To be weak, soft or emotional is to be like a woman. Likewise, for African men to follow the new philosophy – to consider other parameters of existence in which relationships are altered (as compared to the traditional scheme of things) - is to be feminine, to be feeble. Since Okonkwo was unable to re-adjust his own thinking and relationship to the unavoidable contact with the new culture and tradition – he had to be eliminated from existence. As Achebe suggests, Okonkwo was “swept” (1991:24) aside.

In the end of the novel, Okonkwo and other titled men are arrested for the violent destruction of the church. This burning of the church, in my estimation, is emblematic of the extent of the resistance by those who viewed Christian culture as distinctly separate from the traditional manner of living. It represents the violence motivating the leaders and their followers. As Ojinmah contradicts, “the clan's action, of choosing not to fight a war [against the colonialists] they knew they could not win, was consistent with the wisdom of their ancestors” (1991:24). As suggested by Ojinmah, a positive trait – peace, prevailed.

Conclusion

When members of the Umuofian elite are arrested by the District Commissioner, they are scorned and mocked by the messengers. Their symbols of power are also ridiculed. Referring to their anklets, the messengers of the court say, “We see that every pauper wears the anklet of title in Umuofia. Does it cost as much as ten cowry shells?” (1958:171). No longer do these symbols reserve positions of authority for the men. Instead, they were treated like criminals who trespassed against laws of the new pattern of thinking. In the words of the District Commissioner, “[they, the colonialists] have a court of law where [they] judge cases and administer justice just as it is done in [their] own country under a great queen” (1958:171). The African elite are no longer the judiciary in their land; rather, they were now forced to bow to a new form of power which rendered their previous influence and rank as superfluous. Ironically, these very men (Okonkwo included) are no longer overseeing or judging the community. Instead, they become dependent upon the will of those whom they had previously ruled. The District Commissioner, in the new seat of authority, coerces the men to acknowledge the dependency on those whom they previously ruled. “You,” he informs the men, “will be released as soon as you agree to...undertake to collect that fine from *your people* [emphasis added]” (1958:171). Via the constructed and symbolic authority of the District Commissioner, the men develop a state of reliance upon the masses. Here, the true power of the collective is illustrated. In pre-colonial Africa, it was always the masses who upheld the authority of the political and spiritual elite. Yet, when these individuals adopted a view of the new way of life which was not antagonistic, but open and *sensitive*, they gained freedom from centuries of tradition. Krishnamurti speaks of this type of sensitivity.

This sensitivity implies intelligence...we need great intelligence to live, to live our daily life, because it is only intelligence that can possibly bring about a total revolution in our psyche, in the very core of our being (1973:210).

Within the context of colonialism and *Things Fall Apart*, the masses started a social revolution by abandoning their adherence to precepts established by the elite. They were, as suggested by Krishnamurti, sensitive in their approach towards the new. Achebe stresses the strength and totality of the community, as needed to free the former elite, in the following excerpt:

The silence was broken by the village crier beating his sonorous ogene. He called every man in Umuofia, from the Akakanma age-group upwards, to a meeting in the market-place after the morning meal. He went from one end of the village to the other and walked all its breadth. He did not leave out any of the main footpaths (1958:173).

As witnessed above, it was the community that decided to free the men. They could have decided to leave them in a state of incarceration. Yet, Achebe allows sympathy and identity with these men – the force that ultimately sets them free. I believe that Achebe constructed such a scenario to remind the reader of the importance of community and kinship, as earlier suggested by Okonkwo's elder. The few, though always in dominion over the many, could not survive without the subordinated many. They relied upon the masses for sustenance of their power and authority. Hence, "on the morning after the village crier's appeal the men of Umuofia met in the market-place and decided to collect without delay two hundred and fifty bags of cowries" (1958:173). This gesture, though monetary in tone, accentuates the true essence of collective will and power in Africa. It suggests that outside of the constructions of political and cultural thought, and outside of the influence and fear which is induced by authority power figures, the masses of African people possess a power that is often neglected. Krishnamurti stresses the connectedness of a people to their culture when he states:

I think we are apt to forget that our society, the culture

in which we live, which has conditioned us, is the result of human endeavour, conflict, human misery and suffering. Each one of us is that culture; the community is each one of us – we are not separate from it (1973:75).

The villagers in *Things Fall Apart*, before realising the extent to which they upheld pillars of tradition and the elite, accepted the reign of their cultural rulers. However, after incorporating western philosophy into their world-scheme, the Umuofians realised that it was they - who in their indirect maintenance of indigenous power structures – shackled their own selves in a cultural stronghold. Hence, when the colonial forces enter the Umuofian landscape, power is transferred on the same planes in which the indigenous elite previously manipulated its managerial rights. Yet, with awareness as described by Krishnamurti above, it was the will and outcome of the decisions of the masses which ultimately dictated this transfer of energy or authority. Unlike the analysis of colonial growth, which stresses violence, brutality and oppression of traditional, African cultural practices – what I have attempted to reveal is that the masses of African people, as possibly constructed in the fiction of *Things Fall Apart*, had a far greater role in this power-transition than we have acknowledged. Was the advent of Christianity and colonialism, within the cultural and spiritual planes, so detrimental? Was the eventual adaptation or adoption of Christianity so morally wrong, in the decline of traditional systems of thought? To some thinkers, the answer is yes. Yet, if we consider the choices of millions of African people, who up until today accept and acknowledge the vital role western structures of thinking play in our lives and as part of the developmental structures in the continent, it becomes apparent that the masses of African people chose and choose to live within these mental paradigms.

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