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***The Function of Symbolism in Chinua Achebe's Novel
Things Fall Apart***

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master Degree

In English

Option: Literature and Civilization

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to:

The memory of my Grandparents Mohammed, Ali, and Baya

To my grandmother Hafsia

My dear parents

My helpful brother

My lovely sisters

My little angels Aihem, Wael, and Salsabil

My family, Friends and teachers

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Abstract

The present work is in the field of African literature, and it is about the function of symbolism in Chinua Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart*. It attempts to highlight and interpret the symbolic items in the novel *Things Fall Apart*. The novel is a model and landmark of the African literature because it contains an African flavor of oral tradition through folktales and myths, proverbs, idioms, etc, and most of these items exist in the first part where Achebe describes the Ibo society living in harmony and balance. Besides the use of the African oral tradition, there are such events that are highly significant and have relation with the decline of the Ibo society and its representative, who is also the novel's protagonist Okonkwo such as the death of the hostage Ikemefuna and the murder of the missionary. In sum, the novel is highly symbolic, and that Achebe has succeeded in making symbolic function.

Key Words

The function of symbolism, Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, symbolic items, African flavor, oral tradition, Ibo society, harmony and balance, Okonkwo, Ikemefuna, and the missionary.

المخلص

تتدرج دراستنا هته تحت لواء الأدب الإفريقي، والتمثلة في وظيفة الرمزية في رواية تشينوا أتشيببي، من خلال رواية "أشياء تتداعى"، نسعى من خلالها إلى تفكيك رموزها، وكشف شفراتها، حيث تعتبر كنموذج ومعلم لتاريخ الأدب الإفريقي، لأنها تحمل لمسة أفريقية لشمولها على الطابع الشفهي، من قصص شعبية وأساطير وأمثال وغيرها، حيث تمظهرت معظم تلك العناصر في القسم الأول من الرواية، حيث تطرق إلى وصف الحياة الاجتماعية لمجتمع الإيبو قبل الاستعمار، علما أن هذا الأخير كان يعيش في تجانس وتوازن، إضافة إلى استعمال الطابع الشفهي، هناك بعض الأحداث التي لها علاقة بسقوط ممثل مجتمع الإيبو وبطل الرواية أوكانكوو، كان ضمن هذه الأحداث قتل كل من الرهينة إكيمي فونا والمبشر المسيحي، فجاءت الرواية في قمة الرمزية، حيث حقق أتشيببي في توظيفه للرمز النجاح بتفوق وإدراكه قمة هرم الرمزية.

الكلمات المفتاحية

وظيفة الرمزية، تشينوا أتشيببي "أشياء تتداعى"، العناصر الرمزية، لمسة أفريقية، الطابع الشفهي، مجتمع الإيبو، تجانس و توازن أوكانكوو، إكيمي فونا، والمبشر المسيحي.

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Lexical Terms

Allegory: a story, poem, or picture which can be interpreted to reveal a hidden meaning.

Fauna: all the animals living in an area or in a particular period of history.

Flora: the plants of a particular region, habitat (the natural home or environment of an organism), or geographical period.

Imagery: the language that produces pictures in the minds of people reading or listening → visual symbolism.

Orature: the vacuum from which the writers are inspired; the bridge between the oral literature and the written literature, that is, the transition from the orality to the written aspect of literature.

Potestas (بركة): both kinds of spirits: the good spirit, benedicende, and the bad spirit, maledicende.

General Introduction

1. Background of the novel

The Ibos, or Igbos, are related tribes, sharing a common language, beliefs, traditions, and social structure. They inhabit a large forest inland in South-eastern Nigeria between Niger and the Cross Rivers (Zouiche 206). In the past, the Ibos were agricultural people. With the interest in education; they spread out of Nigeria as teachers, traders, and professional men. They were not organized as a nation in a modern political system, but they were organized in small villages or group of villages through a system of agreements, petty squabbles, and settlements. Also, they worshipped many Gods *Chi*, personal God, under one great God *Chukwu*, a central God (Achebe 13,126). Now most of the Ibos are Christians or Agnostics. All these traits are explained by Chinua Achebe in his novel *Things Fall Apart*.

Things Fall Apart is a tragedy of a man and a tragedy of the Ibo society at the same time, taking place in Umuofia and Mbaino villages, the two principal villages in a group of villages called *the nine villages*, between 1850 -1900 (Zouiche 206) . The tragedy takes place in the period just prior to and after the arrival of the white man, bringing with him all that is new: a new religion, a new social system, a new economy. Achebe's source of inspiration for writing this novel are mainly Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Joyce Cary's *Mister Johnson*, and William Butler Yeats's *The Second Coming*. However, the significance of the title was taken from Yeats's poem *The Second Coming* (Killam 13).

2. Structure of the novel

Achebe divided his novel into three parts. The first part can be entitled *The Traditional Life before the Coming of the White Man*, and it is the largest one. It consists of thirteen chapters because, for Achebe, the first part is the most important one

where he exposes in detail the Ibo people living in harmony and balance. Because Achebe really lived in the Ibo society, he tried his best to bring all the beauty of his society by using storytelling, proverbs, and idioms which imply the positive spirit of the Ibo society. Thus, Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* shows the real life of the African people before the arrival of the White Man.

The second part contains six chapters, and it could be entitled as *An Exile*. At the beginning, Okonkwo commits an abomination by killing an innocent person, Ezeudu's son (sixteen years old), which leads to his exile. And at the same time, it is the first appearance of the first white man, a missionary, in Mbaino. Also this part shows how the missionaries penetrate the Ibo society, so they influence the Ibos by leading them to convert Christianity.

Finally, the last part constitutes the last six chapters which can be entitled *Okonkwo's Return to Umuofia Village and the Disintegration of the Ibo Society*. The return of Okonkwo to Umuofia accelerates the death of the old tradition of the Ibo society, especially when he commits suicide since Okonkwo represents the Ibo society, so his suicide leads the traditional society to fall apart.

3. Statement of the problem and the research questions

Since symbolism is the basic feature in African literature. In *Things Fall Apart*, Chinua Achebe gives a great importance to the function of names, animals, spirits, gods, rituals, stories, and so on. So the questions that may rise are:

_Why has Achebe divided "*Things Fall Apart*" in three parts according to a chronological time?

_Why has he borrowed the title of the novel from William Butler Yeats's poem *The Second Coming*?

_Why did Achebe use symbolic names (proper nouns)?

_What are the significance of such events?

_Why did Achebe use a special language (proverbs, idioms, and storytelling)?

_Has Chinua Achebe succeeded in making symbolic function in his novel?

4. Purpose of the research

The research aims at:

_Showing the function of symbolism in *Things Fall Apart*

_Clarifying if Achebe has succeeded in making symbolic function in *Things Fall Apart*

_Explaining why Achebe uses symbolic names.

_Taking the main events in the novel and clarifying their significance.

5. Scope of the research

In this research, we study Chinua Achebe's *things Fall Apart* from one literary angle which is the function of symbolism in the novel.

6. The research methodology

The method that we follow is basically an interpretative method because the research is based on a critical analysis of the novel; taking one literary aspect which is the function of symbolism. It also has recourse to relevant papers and articles made by scholars and historians relating to the history of Nigeria before, during, and after the arrival of the White Man that help us.

7. Structure of the research

The dissertation is divided into two parts; one is theoretical containing one chapter, and the second is practical including two chapters. The first chapter is entitled *Definitions and Background* in which we tackle the following points: definition of symbolism. In literature, symbolism was an aesthetic movement, 19th century, which encouraged writers to express their ideas, feelings, and values by means of symbols or

allusions rather than by direct statements. Also, we handle its schools and symbolism in *Things Fall Apart*. Also, we take an overview upon the following points: symbolism and the African literature, anthropology and the African literature, and the definition of semiotics.

The second chapter is entitled *The Structural Study of Things Fall Apart in Relation to Its Symbolic Functions*; we interpret some behaviors and events. Above all, the significance of the title which Chinua Achebe has taken from William Butler Yeats's poem *The Second Coming* (1921) because both Irish and Ibo society experienced the same issue which is the conflict between two religions paganism and Christianity. Furthermore, we interpret such events that contribute in the decline of the hero Okonkwo so the downfall of the Ibo society since Okonkwo represents his society. First of all, the flaws of Okonkwo begin to appear with the death of Ikemefuna, i.e. the fear of being weak leads to his destruction.

Thus, the murder of Ikemefuna puts Okonkwo in a conflict between his love to the hostage, Ikemefuna, and his fear of being thought weak. Also, exiling Okonkwo means losing his titles and rebuilding his reputation once again. His return to Umuofia constitutes the point of change. It accelerates the death of the Ibo's old days. Finally, the suicide of Okonkwo leads things to fall apart.

In the last chapter, the tackled issue is the language that Chinua Achebe uses in his novel where we interpret all the symbols. The first part contains the most symbolic items because Achebe describes a big part of the Ibo's life in detail, so the most noticeable criteria in his masterpiece are the use of storytelling and proverbs. The folktales and myths help in understanding the general meaning. Also, The Ibos use storytelling and proverbs as a sort of education. For example, when Ekwefi narrates the story of the tortoise with the birds to her daughter, Ezinma, and shows her the right way

of narrating. This later has another aim which is to preserve and transmit their way of narration besides to the stories from generation to generation.

Moreover, Achebe uses proverbs as an answer to Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* which treats Africa as a primordial and cultureless society. He tries to show the complexity of the Ibo's language because proverbs are idiomatic expressions; Unoka, Okonkwo's weak father, says that proverbs are the palm-oil with which words are eaten. Through the use of those witty sayings, Chinua wants to show the importance of orature in the Ibo society. Thus, the African written literature is an orature. The term "orature" is created by the Kenyan novelist and critic N'gugi wa Thiong'o which means the transition from the orality to the written aspect of literature. Thus, *Things Fall Apart* is listening more than reading.

8. Literature Review

Before conducting my research, I looked for recent works and researches about the function of symbolism in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, but I did not find any dissertation. I found only criticism to famous African critics such as Emmanuel Obiechina. For example, he studied the function of folktales and myths and their relation with the overall meaning of the novel. Moreover, there is another critic Gillian Gane who studied the different attitudes of both the Nigerian writers Chinua Achebe and Ben Okri toward nature and environment, especially forests and trees.

In addition, Edward Okoro is another critic who dealt with the Chi symbolism in *Things Fall Apart*. According to Okoro, Chi has two meanings. The first simply means "day". The second has religious background, and it means personal god. Thus, he studied this symbol from a philosophical side. Also, there are two dissertations to Moussa Ndiaye and Farida Zouiche. Moussa Ndiaye's dissertation is about *The Realism in Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart and Anthills of the Savannah*. His choice to

Achebe's first and last novels was because they served his topic. Both novels talk about pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial Africa. Farida Zouiche's dissertation is about *The Novels of Chinua Achebe*. She has spoken about the effects of the European colonizers from their arrival until their leaving to the Nigerian land.

Besides those works, there are other writers who tackled *Things Fall Apart* from many perspectives. So I have chosen to study the novel from one literary aspect which is the function of symbolism in the novel. My choice to this topic is because the novel is full of symbolic items, especially in the first part where Achebe describes the Igbo society living in harmony and balance.

Chapter One: Definitions and Background

1.1. Introduction

In this chapter, the tackled issue is symbolism, anthropology, and semiotics. Besides the three elements, we compare these elements within the novel. Because the African literature is characterized by the use of oral tradition; this latter contains proverbs, folktales, myths, rituals, traditions and customs, and so on. All these components exist in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. The Nigerian critic Obi Wali declared that African writers should write in African languages not with the colonial languages because only the educated elite read it, and that the colonial languages can not reflect the true African literature. The Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o agreed with, but others do not. Chinua Achebe expressed the conviction that, even though his mother tongue was Igbo, "the English language would be able to carry the weight of [his] African experience" ("The African Writer and the English Language", 1965). His novel is widely read throughout the world because of the style and the structure of the novel besides the language that contains proverbs, idioms and metaphors borrowed from African oral heritages.

1.2. Definition of symbolism / symbol

According to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, Symbolism has two definitions. The first is: symbolism is the use of symbols to represent ideas or qualities, especially in art and literature. The second is: an artistic and poetic movement or style originated in France in the nineteenth century by using symbolic images and indirect allusions to express mystical ideas, emotions and states of mind. The Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines symbolism in two ways. The first is the use of symbols is not confined only in art and literature but also in films and other fields, and the second is the symbolist movement is a type of art and literature which began in the

late nineteenth century and tried to express ideas or states of mind rather than represent reality, using the power of words and images.

However, the definition of symbolism differs from one critic to another. For example, the critic Northrop Frye defined symbolism in his book *Anatomy of Criticism*, "Any unit of any literary structure that can be isolated for critical attention. A word, a phrase, or an image used with some kind of special reference (which is what a symbol is usually taken to mean) are all symbols when they are distinguishable elements in critical analysis" (71). The second critic is Andrew Ifeanyi Isiguzo. He states:

Symbol is something such as idea, object, conventional or non conventional that is used to represent something else. It could be abstract or not. Abstract symbols are symbols that do not depend on their concrete material substance. These are abstract entities that are capable of abstracting themselves, freeing themselves, purifying themselves from their possible concrete substance ... the clearest examples of abstract symbols are mathematical symbols and names. (Sec 2)

The last critic is Karen Bernardo defined symbolism as "An integral component of fiction because it enriches the narrative by pulling its message down to the level of our unconscious and anchoring there" (8).

1.3. Definition of anthropology

The word anthropology is a Greek word: *anthrōpos* "man" and *-logia* "study". According to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, "Anthropology is the study of the human race, especially of its origins, development, customs and beliefs; the study of humankind including the comparative study of societies and culture and the science of human zoology and evolution". In Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary, anthropology is, "The study of the human race, its culture and society and its physical

development". From the definitions of such anthropologists, the definition of Eric Wolf who stated in the book *Anthropology*, 1964, "It [anthropology] is in part history, part literature; in part natural science, part social science; it strives to study men both from within and without" (1). Moreover, the definition of Kris Hirst, "the study of anthropology is the study of human beings: their culture, behavior, beliefs, and ways of surviving"(1).

1.4. Definition of semiotics

First of all, the word is a Greek word: (late 19th century) *sēmeiotikos* 'of signs', from *sēmeioun* 'interpret as a sign'. So the definition of semiotics in Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary is, "The study of signs and symbols and their use and meaning", and the same meaning is in Cambridge dictionary, "Semiotics is the study of signs and symbols, what they mean and how they are used". Per Aage Brandt stated:

Semiotics is the study of signs, their forms of expression and contents ...

So what is a sign? ... signs in the non-metaphorical sense are phenomena produced intentionally by humans and taken by humans to show the intention of the producer, and their content. ... Semiotics is a complex, linguistic and gestural sign.. (1)

Moreover, Tamara Nazarova stated, "Semiotics is the theory of sign systems. For decades it has been assumed that every sign system in nature, society and cognition belongs to the domain of semiotics. The literature on the subject is voluminous. Semiotic studies are increasingly attractive to whoever is interested in signs at large" (1).

In general, Semiotics is the study of signs which are something that stands for something else. It could be a gesture, a mark, a word, a picture and so on, and how they work.

1.5. Symbolism in literature

The first appearance of symbolism was in France, 19th century. The symbolist movement was an aesthetic movement. According to Karen Bernardo, it came as a continuation of the romantic tradition which served as a catalyst in the outgrowth of the darker sides of romanticism". Also, it was as a reaction to realism and naturalism novelists such as Gustave Flaubert and Emile Zola. ("Symbolism" 1; 'Symbolism in Literature" 1)

Characterization, dialogue, and plot work on the surface to move the story along, but symbolism works under the surface to link the story's external action to the theme. This is exactly *Things Fall Apart*. Before, in the narration of the fiction, symbolism was often produced through allegory. It gives a relationship between the literal event and its allegorical counterpart correspondence. Allegory is certainly the simplest way of adding more details to a theme. However, it limits the ability of understanding. Thus, those works of literature in which an element of mystery exists are the best. Likewise, those works lend themselves to variety interpretations. (Bernardo 1, 3-4)

The next higher level to allegory can be called symbolism. At this level, there is still a form of correspondence, and yet it is not so one-to-one because allegory operates very consciously while symbolism operates unconsciously. For example, the case of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, we notice that Hamlet is fascinated with actors and acting, but the intelligent reader observes that this is because Hamlet's whole life has become unreal; he is being haunted by the ghost of his father. This latter is murdered by Hamlet's uncle with whom his mother has married. Thus, the motif of actor is the symbol for the unreality of Hamlet's life. (Bernardo 5-6)

In general, the difference between imagery and symbolism is obvious since the purpose of imagery is not to incorporate meaning but to create the sense of real

experience by stimulating the senses of the reader. Nonetheless, an image may also serve as a symbol if it has special meaning and represents another idea to the reader or to the character itself. ("Imagery and Irony" 4)

1.6. Literary works of symbolism

1.6.1. In poetry

The symbolist movement had its beginnings in the poetry of French poet and art critic Charles Pierre Baudelaire, one of the leaders of symbolist movement. He encouraged the writers to represent their ideas, feelings, and values through symbols and allusions rather than through direct statements. Also, he was known for his evocative imagery and musical language. Both his works (poems) *The Flowers of Evil* (*Les Fleur du Mal*, 1857) and *Paris Spleen* (*Le Spleen de Paris*, 1869) explore the range and complexity of human passion and love. For that, his contemporaries considered both his works as decadent. Moreover, life and works of Edgar Alan Poe illustrated the admiration of Baudelaire for Poe's darker aesthetic ("Symbolism in Literature" 1-2).

Moreover, there were three notable French authors whose works of poetry associated with the movement. The first was Stéphane Mallarmé. His prose *The Afternoon of a Faun* (*L'après-midi d'un Faune*, 1876) carried on the movement. Besides his prose studies *Ramblings* (*Divagations*, 1897) which formed one of the important statements of the symbolist aesthetic. By the age of 19, Arthur Rimbaud had composed poems such as *The Drunken Boat* (1871), *Vowels* (1886), *The Rooks* (1886), *Blackcurrant River* (1886), and *Festivals of Endurance* (1886) that considered some of the important works of poetry in French literature. Since his works were characterized by vivid language and imagery, they became as a model to the symbolist movement in poetry. The last author that his work *Songs without Words* (*Romances Sans Paroles*,

1874) associated with the movement was Paul Verlaine. ("Symbolism in Literature" 2; "The Flower of Evil" 1)

1.6.2. In fiction

In fiction, most novels have two layers of meaning. The first layer is in the literal plot, and the second layer is in a symbolic layer in which images and objects represent abstract ideas and feelings. Since the beginning of the genre, novelists of the 19th century created symbolic patterns of imagery. Famous symbol works are Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925), James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* (1851), and Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902) ("Symbolism" 1; "Great Works of Literature" 2-3-4). This last author, Chinua Achebe was deeply influenced by his work *Heart of Darkness*.

As it is mentioned before, symbolism came as a continuation to the darker sides of romanticism. The works of Nathaniel Hawthorne explores the darker side of human nature, especially themes of guilt and efforts of reconciliation. One famous example of symbolism is his novel *The Scarlet Letter*. This novel gives a glance about the norms and behaviors of 17th century American puritan society. The main conflicts and problems are about a female protagonist, Hester Prynne, that has born a baby out of wedlock, and she refuses to confess who the father of her baby is. As a punishment to her adultery, she wears a scarlet letter A that symbolizes to her adultery. ("Great Works of Literature" 1-2)

Other great use of symbolism is F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925). This novel is a mixture between imagination and reality. According to Gatsby everything can be bought with money even love. F. Scott Fitzgerald is an American novelist and short story writer. His works chronicled the glitter and excess of American

society in the 1920's. He christened this era the Jazz age. In general, Fitzgerald, in his works, depicted the hidden desperation and emptiness of the society members ("Great Works of Literature" 3; "F. Scott Fitzgerald" 1).

According to the English novelist Joseph Conrad, the novelist must look for image. He used symbols extensively in his short novel *Heart of Darkness* (1902) in which he treats the African people as a primordial people. The plot is about an English sailor, Marlow, who travels to Africa where he meets another European man, Kurtz. Also, he shows the weaknesses in human character. Moreover, his travelling to wilderness symbolizes his spiritual exploration to his own soul. ("Great Works of Literature" 5-6; "Joseph Conrad" 1)

Symbols sometimes have more than two meanings as in Irish author James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916). James Joyce used birds as a symbol. This symbol bird has different meanings. First, it represents the notion of escape. Also, it is associated with the Greek mythological figure Icarus who wears artificial wings. He flies near the sun, so his wings damage. Then, he falls down into the ocean. Other meanings to the symbol bird are beauty, imagination, religion, and sexual desire. ("Great Works of Literature" 4)

Other work attracted the attention of the readers is *Moby Dick* (1851) by an American author Herman Melville. The novel is about a whale whose name is given to the title of the book, and a seaman, captain Ahab, who is obsessed by hunting and killing the whale, Moby Dick, because it was responsible in losing the captain Ahab one of his legs. The captain and his boat, the Pequod, catch Moby Dick, but the whale damages the boat and escapes. Melville received a comment on the symbol of the whale from D. H. Lawrence. He said "Of course he is a symbol. Of what? I doubt if even Melville knew exactly. That's the best of it". ("Great Works of Literature" 6)

1.6.3. In drama

Symbolism spread out of France. In 1911, Belgian author Maurice Maeterlinck is awarded the Nobel Prize in literature for his imagination. Also, he is a playwright. *Pelléas et Mélisande* is one of the few symbolist dramas. Another play is *The Blind* (1890). This play is about twelve blind characters lost in the forest, and they are unaware that their sighted guide is dead. Then, they find themselves in a case of inability to take an action. ("From the Blind" 1; "Symbolism in Literature" 3)

As a sum to the symbolist movement, Karen Bernardo defined symbolism as, "An integral component of fiction because it enriches the narrative by pulling its message down to the level of our unconscious and anchoring there". The symbolist movement continued to the 1890's in the works of the French poets like Jules Laforgue and Paul Valéry and works of the writer and critic Rémy de Gourmont. Furthermore, the Belgian playwright Maurice Maeterlinck's *Pelléas et Mélisande* which is considered as one of the few symbolist dramas. Symbolism spread out of France, especially to Russia in the work of poet Aleksander Blok. Finally, symbolism influenced the 20th century literature. (Bernardo 8; "Symbolism in Literature" 3)

1.7. The African literature

African literature was basically oral until the 20th century. The oral tradition contains proverbs, myths, and poetry has influenced the modern written African literature. Almost all the African contemporary African writers mix elements from the oral tradition (stories) to their fiction ("African literature" 1). Why? Because of their origins and to illustrate moral points as what is mentioned in the book *Magical Realism in West African Fiction* by Brenda Cooper, such great African writers justified the interference of the stories in their works. For example, Ama Ata Aidoo, she is a Ghanaian dramatist, poet, novelist and short story writer, says in an interview, "I came from a

people who told stories. When I was growing up in the village we had a man who was a good story teller. And my mother ' talks' stories and sings songs", and Chinua Achebe, he is a Nigerian novelist and essayist, who explains, "I have always been fond of stories and intrigued by language-first Igbo, spoken with such eloquence by the old men of the village..."(40).

Although Africa has had a lasting relation tradition of poetry and drama, the novel is today the dominant literary genre on the continent. Undoubtedly, the appeal of the novel has a relation with the narratives that have always played in the African societies. In prose, the folktale is the most feature of the African literature, and the characters of these stories are animals (trickster hero) in the form of a tortoise, a rabbit, or a spider since these animals are the most popular in the African societies ("African literature" 1). Also, they have a symbolic function and representation of human values in the stories, i.e. personification. The folktales and fables are not the only didactic source in the traditional African societies, but there are, too, the mythical tales like the religious tales that give a history and world view of a particular group(1). In short, the novel has today achieved the feature of a cultural significance that was once concern the oral narrative only.

Moreover, not only the prosaic forms of the African literature that are characterized with the oral narratives, but the poetic forms are too. Thus, the themes of such poems are linked to particular occupations or clans. For example, the *Ijala* performed by Yoruba hunters, or the songs of the *Iwe* fishing communities. One of the poetic forms is religious poetry that contains hymns to the gods, prophetic poems, and didactic poems which are also highly symbolic. In most African languages, there are many laments, love songs, children' chants, war poems, and poems of praise like the praise poem of southern Africa. In the Democratic Republic of Congo (before Zaire),

Ghana, and Nigeria, poetry is accompanied by drums. Other literary genre to the African literature is drama. The concentration of traditional African drama which main subjects are linked to rituals and social events are mime, dance, music, costumes and masks, and the influence of the traditional African literature is significant. ("Oral Literature" 1-2)

1.8. Symbolism in the African literature

Since the colonial period, the African culture has changed. Thus, the contemporary African culture has become a mixture of the traditional elements and alien features. As Theophilus Okere stated,

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

The African identity is in crisis, and there is a need to give back and to preserve the authentic cultures especially those which are in practice. How? According to Deena Metzger in her book *Writing for Your Life*, "Self discovery is more than gathering information about oneself." She continues, "In the process of ... discovering our story, we restore those parts of ourselves that have been scattered, hidden, suppressed, denied, distorted, forbidden, and we come to understand that stories heal". Since the past, the African societies have restored and preserved their identity and history through the arts by using symbols, animal symbols that represent the nature of man, in forms of arts, myths, rituals, language, and names (Sec 1).

In the African literature, symbolism is the main feature as N.K. Dzobo said, "Symbols are sources of insights into African orientations to life." He continued to make

the distinction between signs and symbolism in the degree of qualitative of information that they convey, "While signs provide simple information, symbols are used to communicate complex knowledge". Furthermore, the importance of symbolism is to show the diversity of the continent as Dzobo has said before. (Ifeanyi Isiguzo sec 3)

One of great poets of South Africa is Natal-born Roy Compbell (1901_1957). His poems are included into two main groups: mythological and satirical. Also, he was included by the symbolist movement to Eugène Marais, William Plomer and Laurens Van Der Post, and to the exponents of symbolism T.S Eliot and Ezra Pound. Compbell works are characterized by combining features of other works because he was admired by other poets' works in writing his poems. For example, his poems' themes and ideas are taken from the works of Luis Vaz de Cammoens and the two symbolists (Guillaume Apollinaire and Arthur Rimbaud. The most suitable example to these two criteria is his poem *The Flaming Terrapin*. This idea contains the idea of Arthur Rimbaud's *The Drunken Boat (Le Bateau Ivre)* and the theme of the purification of the Hindu epic *The Mahabharata*. Besides his admiration to the previous poets, he is, too, inspired by Ghandi and the Hindu presence in Natal. His last three works in myths and symbolist literary revivals of ancient literary themes are the sonnet "*Mithraic Emblems*", the series "*Toledo*", and "*Horizon*". Those works gave Compbell's view of Christianity as a continuation of pre-Christian beliefs and symbols. For example, *Methraic Emblems* depicts an ecclesiastical image of seven swords that enters the Virgin Mary's heart which those swords are presented as shafts of sunlight polarize to symbolize the seven colors of the rainbow. (Heywood 61,63,64)

The second symbolist poet is William Plomer (1903_1973). His poems are characterized by using a muted, colloquial style and violence in background that concerns specific events. During his living in London, 1930's, many English poets of

20th century notably W.H Auden are admired by his colloquial and narrative style. At the end, his ambiguous side of symbolist tradition went on or marked its end in the works of Charles Madge, South African-born (1912-1996). Whose works are concerned with the war of 1939_1996. In London, he worked as a professor of sociology at Birmingham University from 1950 till 1970. Charles Madge had two collections of poems *The Disappearing Castle* (1937) and *The Father Found* (1941). This latter is a symbolist drama, and both works are written in a variety of elevated style. Furthermore, both of them are characterized by themes of Marks and Freud. (Heywood 64-65)

1.9. Anthropology and the African literature

African literature has become important to many non-literary disciplines ranging from anthropology to natural science (Gikandi xii- xiii) because it is historical and fictional at the same time. It gives records about the continent: past and present. Thus, the works of such African writers are widely read and taught throughout the world. One of those writers is Chinua Achebe. His novels are considered as a source of knowledge about Africa. So the novel *Things Fall Apart* represents the Ibo society before, during, and after the colonialism, and *Arrow of God* represents the African culture during the colonial period while *No Longer at Ease* represents the shift from colonialism to post-colonialism. Also, Achebe's works have the sense of realism, and those works gave the features of the African literature and the African societies.

Many anthropologists are interested in the study of folklore that contains folktales, myths, traditions and customs, and so on since it reflects the reality and the history of the African societies. For that, Herskovits has shown the importance of the folktale, "As a part of folklore, is not just a literary expression, but in fact it gives a true image of the people's lives" (Farouk Ahmed 46). Many anthropologists such as E. Sapir and D. Tait agreed with Herskovits that the oral tradition is a source of the history (14).

Sapir, for example, insisted on the reliability of the oral tradition by giving an example of the Indians Pueblo and Nahult because the oral tradition of those tribes contains the immigration and the movements of tribes and caravans (14). Another anthropologist H.W Beiber proved that Yoruba (Muslims) and Ibos (Christians) people were soldiers not farmers through the oral tradition (myths) of those people (15-16).

1.10. Conclusion

After about century from the symbolist movement, Chinua Achebe wrote his novel *Things Fall Apart* in 1958. This novel is considered as a model to the identity of the African literature because it characterized with the oral traditions besides the structure and style. Moreover, Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is used in non-literary disciplines history, humanities, natural sciences, anthropology, and so on since it records the events during the colonial period besides the behaviors and way of life of the Ibo people before the colonialism. Thus, this novel can be studied from many angles, but I have chosen one angle which is symbolism that can be mixed with anthropology and semiotics. In sum, *Things Fall Apart* functions with symbolism.

Chapter Two: The Structural Study of *Things Fall Apart* in Relation to Its Symbolic Functions

2.1. Introduction

The novel is a story of human beings repeating themselves in a cyclical movement. In this chapter, we are going to interpret such events that have significance. The main character, Okonkwo, represents the Ibo society their culture and tradition. Therefore, all the events that happen in the novel have a relation with Okonkwo, and these events lead to the disintegration of the old Ibo society, especially the death of its representative Okonkwo.

2.2. Symbolism in *Things Fall Apart*

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

The second is Achebe's use of language. The most noticeable criteria in his masterpiece are the use of Ibo words and phrases, proverbs, storytelling, myths and other elements of oral tradition in order to record and preserve the Ibo oral tradition. This latter contributes in giving the African literature its identity. The use of special language has another meaning. The novel is published just before the independence of Nigeria in 1958 (Reader 275; Oliver and Fage 220), so it comes to destroy the

colonialist culture and language. In 1920, Sir Gordon Guggisberg, Governor of the Gold Coast (present-day Ghana), declared,

One of the great mistakes of the education in the past has been this, that it has taught the African to become a European instead of remaining African. This is entirely wrong and the government recognizes it. In future, our education will aim at making an African remain an African and taking interest in his own country. (Reader 620-621)

However, the use of language is necessary to understand the events of Achebe's novel, especially the protagonist Okonkwo who represents the Ibo society and tradition. The use of narrative proverbs show the quality of the African Literature and to clarify that the Ibo people are wise unlike Joseph Conrad did not. Besides the proverbs, there are nine narratives folktales, myths, and anecdotes. Those narratives are: The first narrative is the quarrel between Sky and Earth. This narrative resembles the case of Okonkwo and his son, Nwoye. Okonkwo wants his son to listen to masculine stories, but Nwoye prefers his mother stories, i.e. the personality of Okonkwo and Nwoye. The second narrative is the tortoise and the birds. This trickster tale is didactic because it shows why the shell of the tortoise is not smooth. The third narrative is the locusts myth. The locusts, here, represent the invaders, the white men. The fourth narrative is Ikemefuna's song. Ikemefuna sings this song in his mind, and this song has two directions. One, is Okonkwo, who is warned by Ogbuefi Ezeudu, the king, who is warned by his people? Two, is Ikemefuna the one who is at risk not his mother?

The other five narratives are the mosquito myth, the abame story, the kite myth, the snake-lizard myth, and the anecdote of the expert thieves of Umuike market. After three days of Ikemefuna's death, Okonkwo falls asleep, but he is tormented by the mosquitoes. Then, he remembers his mother's story. Okonkwo always listens to his

heart that he must be strong not weak and what leads him to this thinking is his weak father, Unoka. Also, he refuses the advice of his friend Ogbuefi Ezeudu to do not intervene in killing Ikemefuna. The abame story is told by Obierika; all what happens in the Abame village. This story contains all the features of the performance and the most behaviors of the West African people. Through this story, Uchendu, Okonkwo's uncle, recites the story of the kites to know the response of the white men when the missionary is killed. Furthermore, the function of the other two stories, the snake-lizard myth, and the anecdote of the expert thieves of Umuike market, are to enrich the style of the novel

Moreover, there are many signs in the novel. For example, having yams is a sign of wealth, masculinity, and ability to feed the family. Also, from the signs of wealth are having wives and children. Throughout the novel, the characters and the narrator compare Okonkwo with fire, and from his nicknames is Roaring Flame. Fire is a sign of purity and masculinity. Other symbols are ash, the *egwugwu*, and the mother of the spirits. Ash represents the emasculation, lifeless, and so on. Besides Okonkwo resembles his son, Nwoye, with ash, the court messengers are too called Ashy-Buttocks. Moreover, the *egwugwu*, the masked Umuofia elders, represents the culture and the independence of Umuofia. According to Okonkwo, the folktales that are told by the mothers to their children symbolize femininity. The mother of the spirits is seen as a mother of the *egwugwu*. Besides all these symbols, there are other symbols which are the proverbs and such events like the killing of Ikemefuna, killing of the first white man, and so on.

2.3. The significance of the title

The title of the novel *Things Fall Apart* is extracted from the poem *The Second Coming* by William Butler Yeats; he was a late 19th century Irish poet, essayist, and dramatist:

Turning and turning in the widening gyre

The falcon cannot hear the falconer;

Things Fall Apart; the centre cannot hold;

Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world. (Lines 1-4)

Both *The Second Coming* and *Things Fall Apart* know the same issue which is religion. Before the coming of the Christian invaders, both the Ibos and the Irish know the same peaceful life. Also, both know crimes led by the Christian invaders in the name of god. Moreover, both societies are taken by the same resistance and desire for survival. Thus, the title *Things Fall Apart* means that when a society accumulates injustice, killing innocence, it is naturally forced to vanish. However, Moussa Ndiaye explained, "the title of the book [*Things Fall Apart*] which symbolizes the cultural conflicts and the misunderstanding between the white man and the Igbos or the Africans by extension"(29-30).

2.4. The significance of writing the novel

Chinua Achebe wrote his novel as a reaction to such writers, especially Joseph Conrad who treats Africans as savages and primordial people. Conrad portrays the African values in negative terms. Achebe writes to "dispel old images in order to create a true sense of his people's dignity" as Rhoads says (Ndiaye 30). In one of his interviews, Chinua Achebe was asked about the aim of writing such a novel *Things Fall Apart*. He simply answered that he is a didactic writer. Moreover, he set his novel in the past to show the existence of civilization in Africa. He said, "African people did not hear of culture for the first time from Europeans: [...] their societies were not mindless but frequently had a philosophy of great depth and value and beauty, [...] they had poetry and, above all they had dignity" (30).

2.5. The significance of past tense

The African literature is characterized by using elements of the African tradition. The Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe is one of the most important African writers because of his choice of topics and themes. His choice of topics is related to the history of Africa, i.e. realism in his works as Moussa Ndiaye explained, "There is the fact that he is imbued with culture, proud of his origins and has never given up advocating a deep-rooted literature. He has always believed that, in African literature, experiences from Africa should be dealt with; what's more they should be handled within an African setting" (1). Thus, his use of past tense is to portray the real experiences of Africans before, during and after the coming of the colonizers especially his first and last novels *Things Fall Apart* and *Anthills of the Savannah*. The realism appears in the use of African culture and events during the coming of the white man.

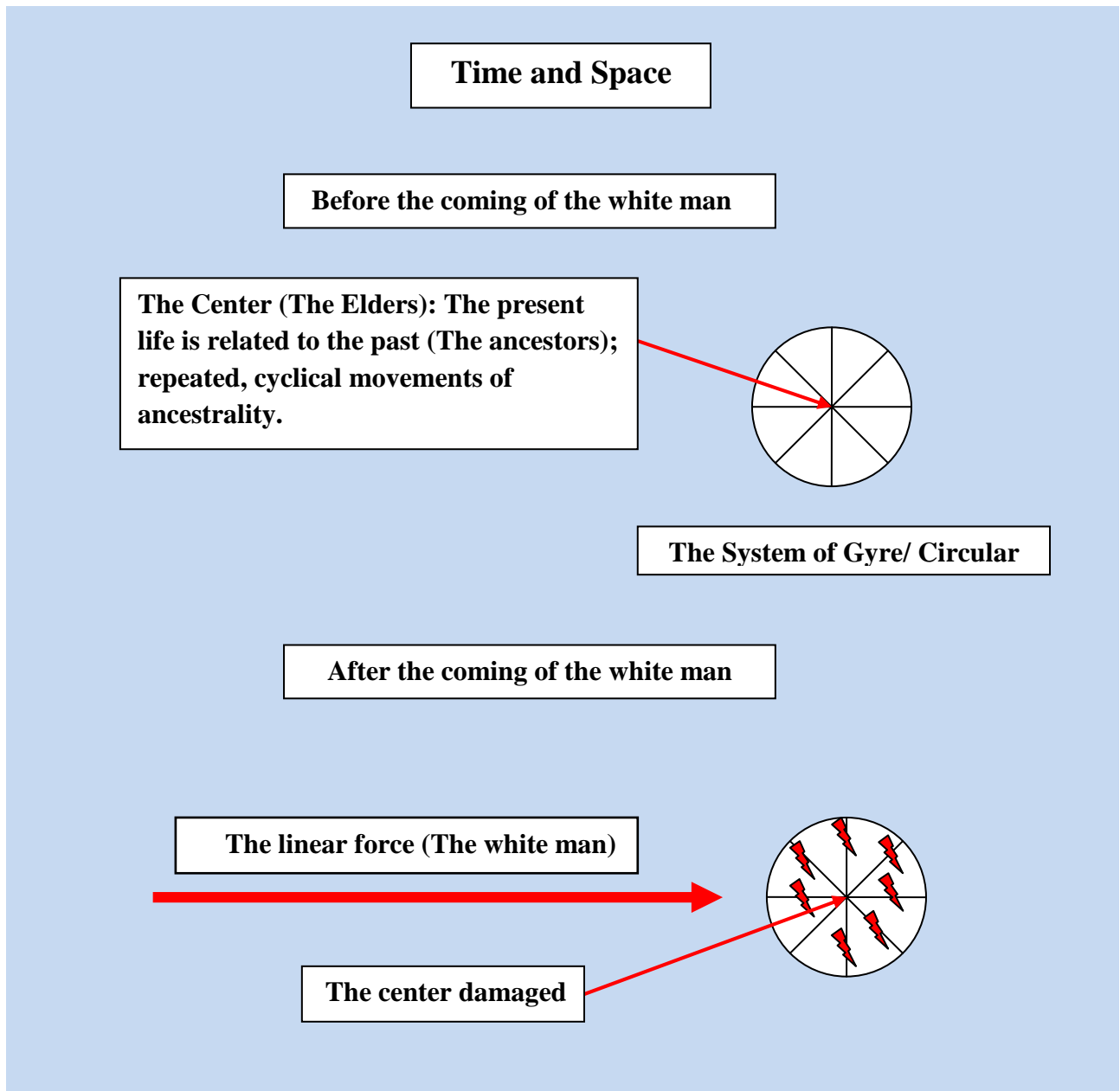
2.6. Time and space

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

Moreover, the elders are the keepers of the old African time because they are the witnesses who remember the history of their community. These facts are transmitted

from generation to generation. The African people, too, believe that everything is animated by good spirits, benedicende, or bad spirits, maledicende, i.e. potestas, both kinds of spirits. In the novel *Things Fall Apart*, the most dramatic event in Africa is the coming of the white man, i.e. the European colonization. Chinua Achebe insisted on this period to understand the present and to prepare the future. Also, Achebe is attempting to show the circular African vision of time and space, i.e. the system of gyre, and the linear European vision of time.

After the colonization, the pre-colonial Africa is opposed to the linear time of the white man. The main character, Okonkwo, constitutes the central point in the novel, and who represents the closed circle of society. By the coming of the white man, the traditional mechanism of order disappears with its representative Okonkwo. He is well-known through the nine villages for his courage, but the dominance of Umuofia diminishes with the death of Okonkwo and becomes part of what is now Nigeria because the European government unifies and organizes the nine villages under one nation which is now Nigeria by bringing new systems and new economic. All these changes happen because the indigenous people were mainly inside faltering because of the injustice laws and rules of the villages.

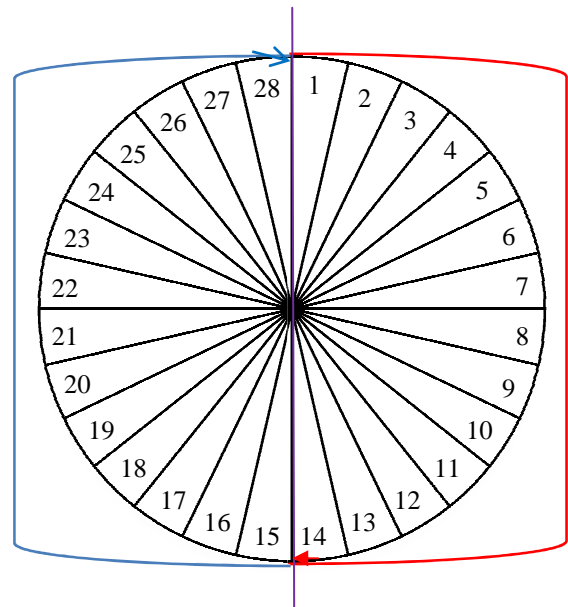


Source: Mr. Slimane Temagout's lecture

This diagram explains the relation of the Africans with their ancestors, that is, everything is related with the past. In other words, life repeats itself. After the arrival of the white man, this center damaged. So that is what happens to the Ibo society and its representative Okonkwo.

Full Moon

- Subjectivity (Darkness): living under one's opinions and feelings
- Objectivity (moonlight): reality



Source: Mr. Slimane Temagout's lecture

Moon contains twenty eight sides → seven weeks / one week → four days

In the African society, the night is full of evil spirits and sinister animals as it is shown in the novel, and that there is a link between life and death, i.e. there is no death, reincarnation (life, death, life, death). For example, the notion of Ogbanje, the dead child returns to his mother's womb to be born once again.

2.7. Symbolic characters

In *Things Fall Apart*, there is a relation between the characters and what they represent. Achebe gives a great importance to the function of names, and what the characters symbolize in the novel. Even the name Umuofia as a village has a meaning as Paul Briens's study guide for *Things Fall Apart*, "Umuofia, the name of the

community, means 'people of the forest'" (qtd. in Gane 44). So the three main characters Okonkwo, Nwoye, and Ikemefuna besides Ekwefi's sons have meanings.

First of all, Okonkwo, the protagonist, is a self-made man, great wrestler, farmer, and husband who is also cruel and afraid of failure and weakness. Primarily, Okonkwo means strong and stands for strength unlike his father, Unoka, means weak and stands for weakness. He represents the Ibo society: their tradition and culture. Throughout the novel, Okonkwo is famous with the nicknames Flaming Fire (Achebe 108), Living Fire (109), and Roaring Flame (108). He acquires these nicknames because of many reasons. At the beginning of the novel, Okonkwo defeats Amalinze the Cat which gains him the first fame. He gains the nickname "the Roaring Flame" through his achievements in early age. He becomes wealthy through working hard and sharecropping, so these two latter help him to establish his own compound and crops.

The second character is Nwoye, Okonkwo's son. He is sensible and resembles his grandfather Unoka. He leaves his father and converts Christianity. He symbolizes wind ("T F A character symbolism" 3) because he quickly converts Christianity; he goes with the wind. The reason that pushes him to convert Christianity is mainly the death of Ikemefuna. The new faith brings clarifications and proofs to the wrong orientation of the old Igbo religion. Besides Nwoye, Christianity attracts the underprivileged Osu and Efulufu, mothers who have lost their twins.

The third character is the hostage Ikemefuna. He is the closed friend to Nwoye and he has a great influence of him. Ikemefuna symbolizes a wilting-flower because of his tragedy in the novel. First of all, when Mbaino elders give him to Umuofia as a compensation for the murder of the Umuofian woman, he serves as a pawn by his village's elders. So he has to adopt a new life in a new village Umuofia, and leaves his village Mbaino as the wilting flower which suffers the elements of the environment.

Furthermore, he suffers from his misfortune when Okonkwo kills him although his love to Ikemefuna as a sacrifice as the Oracle orders ("T F A character symbolism" 4). Also, he represents the way of life of Umuofia people because just after his death the Umuofia village begins to destroy.

Otherwise, not only the characters have a symbolic function, but also the names of the characters do such as Ekwefi's sons. She gives her sons special names in order to plead God to keep her kids alive and to break Ogbanje children's chain, Ogbanje means a child who dies and returns to his mother's womb to be reborn:

One of them was a pathetic cry, Onwumbiko—"Death, I implore you."

But Death took no notice,- Onwumbiko died in his fifteenth month. The next child was a girl, Ozoemena—"May it not happen again." She died in her eleventh month, and two others after her. Ekwefi then became defiant and called her next child Onwuma—"Death may please himself."

And he did. (Achebe 54)

Thus, Achebe has shown the importance of naming system in the Ibo society. Not only the naming system of people is important but also the naming of places and tribes as a whole does. For example, Umuofia means 'the people of forest' (qtd. in Gane 44).

2.8. The significance of using Ibo words and idioms

Chinua Achebe uses Ibo words and idioms to add an African flavor to his work and in order to distinguish it from the European literature. Thus, his novel *Things Fall Apart* marked the birth of the African literature, especially the Nigerian literature or more specifically the Ibo literature. Throughout the novel, we find three categories of Linguistic innovation, lexical creation: loan-words, retain the Igbo meaning and form,

coinages, retain the Igbo meaning but English form, and loan-blends, combines items from English and Igbo to form new meanings.

Each of these elements is represented in the novel. For example, loan-words are in forms of titles, food, religion and traditional customs written in italic within the novel (Igboanusi 57). The most noticeable examples in the novel are: "It is an *ozo* dance" (Achebe 41), here, an *ozo* is a titleholder. "He called his son, Nwoye, to sit with him in his *obi*" (44) *obi* is a loan-word meaning a house for the head of the family where he receives guests. "All the *umunna* were invited to the feast, all the descendants of Okolo, who had lived about two hundred years before" (117), *umunna* means a group of men who are related, and a loan-word of a group of women is *umuada*, " "It was the full gathering of *umuada*, in the same way as they would meet if a death occurred in the family" (93). Finally, the use of loan-words may be because they have no lexical equivalent in English (Igboanusi 59).

The second is coinages which are compound English words. These add new words to the English language. Some of those coinages that are mentioned in the novel are: "She did not marry him then because he was too poor to pay her bride-price" (Achebe 28), here, bride-price is equivalent to dowry in English. "He drank palm-wine from morning till night, and his eyes were red and fierce like the eyes of a rat when it was caught by the tail and dashed against the floor" (44), so the palm-wine is an alcoholic drink made from the palm tree, and the most noticeable one is iron-horse which is a coinage for bicycle, "And he was riding an iron horse" (97). These words enrich the English language, and that the African novels written in English are full of them.

The last one is loan-blend. As it is mentioned before that loan-blend is a combination of English and Igbo items to form a new meaning. So this is a sample from

the novel, "Some kinsmen ate it with *egusi soup* and others with bitterleaf soup" (Achebe 117). Besides these three elements, there is what is called Igboism. Igboism reflects the traditional life and cultural habits (Igboanusi 63); for example, "Who will drink the dregs?" he asked. "Whoever has *a job in hand* ..." (15), here, *a job in hand* means 'a newly married man', and in Ibo language is "iji oru n'aka" (63).

In sum, most of the authentic Igbo idioms are translated into English to fit the situation. Eldred Jones calls the Ibo idioms, "vernacular style" (Ndiaye 77).

2.9. The significance of such events

2.9.1. Ikemefuna's murder

"As the man who had cleared his throat drew up and raised his machete, Okonkwo looked away. He heard the blow. The pot fell and broke in the sand. He heard Ikemefuna cry, "My father, they have killed me!" as he ran towards him. Dazed with fear, Okonkwo drew his machete and cut him down. He was afraid of being thought weak" (Achebe 43).

Since Ikemefuna represents the way of life of Umuofia people, his death points the beginning of Okonkwo's destruction; the destruction of the Ibo society. Although Okonkwo's love and care of Ikemefuna, he kills him. So his killing to the boy means his participation in the destruction of himself. The same thing happens to the Ibos. Though they care and love their way of life, they accept the new faith that leads to the destruction of the Ibo tradition ("Symbols in T F A" 5). The anguish of Okonkwo about the death of the Hostage Ikemefuna is a sign of weakness (Stratton 33). Therefore, he curses himself with the worst words he can think of, "When did you become a shivering old women', Okonkwo asked himself, 'you, who are known in all the nine villages for your valor in war? How can a man who has killed five men in battle fall to

pieces because he has added a boy to their number? Okonkwo, you have become a woman indeed'" (Achebe 45).

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

2.9.2. Okonkwo's crime and exile

"Ezeudu was a great man, and so all the clan was at his funeral ... It was a warrior's funeral" ... " And then from the center of the delirious fury came a cry of agony and shouts of horror. It was as if a spell had been cast. All was silent. In the center of the crowd a boy lay in a pool of blood. It was the dead man's sixteen year- old son, who with his brothers and half-brothers had been dancing the traditional farewell to their father. Okonkwo's gun had exploded and a piece of iron had pierced the boy's heart". (Achebe 84,86)

After the death of Ikemefuna, the many flaws of Okonkwo begin to appear. His killing to Ikemefuna is not an accident; it is because of his pride. However, killing Ezeudu's son, sixteen years old, is a purely accidental event. Before the accident, we have learnt that the gun is old and rusty, "Okonkwo decided to go out hunting. He had an old rusty gun made by a clever blacksmith who had come to live in Umuofia long ago" (Achebe 27). Although his crime is an accident, it is viewed as an abomination in the land. So according to the kind of the crime which is a female, he and his family have to flee his fatherland or indeed Umuofia village before the crow of the cock. Thus, his exile for seven years means losing his titles and properties including his compound, farm, yams, etc and rebuilding his reputation once again:

As soon as the day broke, a large crowd of men from Ezeudu's quarter stormed Okonkwo's compound, dressed in garbs of war. They set fire to his houses, demolished his red walls, killed his animals and destroyed his barn. It was the justice of the earth goddess *Ani*, and they were merely her messengers. They had no hatred in their hearts against Okonkwo. His greatest friend, Obierika, was among them. They were merely cleansing the land which Okonkwo had polluted with the blood of a clansman". (87)

His exile shows that the Ibos live in harmony and balance. If the Ibos disobey the law by allowing Okonkwo to stay, all the Ibos will be punished by the Earth Goddess *Ani* as the elders said, "If one finger brought oil, it soiled the others" (Achebe 87).

In sum, Okonkwo's crime and exile indicate the importance of nature to the Ibos.

2.9.3. The appearance and killing of the first white man

"During the last planting season a white man had appeared in their clan."

"An albino," suggested Okonkwo. "He was not an albino. He was quite different." ... The elders consulted their Oracle and it told them that the strange man would break their clan and spread destruction among them."

... "And so they killed the white man and tied his iron horse to their sacred tree because it looked as if it would run away to call the man's friends ... the Oracle said. It said that other white men were on their way. They were locusts, it said, and that first man was their harbinger sent to explore the terrain. (Achebe 97-98)

After the exile of Okonkwo, The first white man appears in Abame village where the elders kill him after they consult the Oracle. The appearance of the white man

in the village resembles the appearance of the locusts:

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

So this is a sign of invasion and change. The most dangerous thing in the invasion is when it touches the religion that is what happens to the Ibo society. Further, the white man's death gives the Europeans a chance to invade the Ibos. The white men bring all what is new, a new religion, economy, social structure, etc. The new religion, Christianity, is seen as a 'civilizing agent' acts as a catalyst in damaging the old traditional religion of the Ibos (Killam 33). Later, the British colonizers destroy one of the main pillars of the tribe which is the chain of fathers and their sons as the case of Okonkwo and Nwoye.

2.9.4. The conversion of the majority of Ibos

After the coming of the white man, the most converts to Christianity were the underprivileged Osu, Efulufu, and Okonkwo's son, Nwoye who is called later Isaac is one of the converts to Christianity, and his deed means the destruction of the chain between him and his father, Okonkwo, as when Obierika asks Nwoye about what he is doing with the missionaries, " 'I am one of them' replied Nwoye. 'How is your father?'" Obierika asked, not knowing what else to say. 'I don't know. He is not my father', said Nwoye, unhappily."(Achebe 101) .The main cause of his conversion is the hymn that answers his questions of the twins crying in the bush and Ikemefuna's murder (104).

All in all, we notice that only the weak people who convert the new religion, so this means that those new converts are inside fell apart, i.e. they are not well religious people. Also, the white men bring only the good things that the Ibos cannot resist as Obierika has said. According to me, Chinua Achebe gives not only the positive sides of the Ibos but also the negative ones. Thus, the conversion of those people is because the new religion equalizes between all the members of the society.

2.9.5. Okonkwo's return to Umuofia village

Okonkwo is exiled to his motherland for seven years because he commits an abomination against the Earth goddess *Ani* by killing an innocent person accidentally. During this period, the white men build their power in the Evil Forests of Umuofia and Mbanta. After seven years, he returns to Umuofia. His return accelerates the death of the old tradition of the Ibo society. Okonkwo's return resembles the case of Snake-Lizard myth structurally and thematically (Nnaemeka 62). Why?

The numerology of number seven years means the dominance of the white men in both the realms Umuofia and Mbanta when Okonkwo has no political or military mandate in both realms. This case resembles the case of Amalinze the Cat as a champion wrestler for seven years when Okonkwo is haunted by his father's *agbala* figure, Unoka. Returning to the snake-lizard myth, after the snake-lizard kills his parent, he brings another seven baskets to cook them again, but he fails in regaining the seven baskets. So the same thing in the novel, the Mbantans fail in confronting and removing the white man out of the village. (Nnaemeka 61)

Seven years was a long time to be away from one's clan. A man's place was not always there, waiting for him. As soon as he left, someone else rose and filled it. The clan was like a lizard; if it lost its tail it soon grew another. Okonkwo knew these things. He knew that he had lost his place

among the nine masked spirits who administered justice in the clan. He had lost the chance to lead his warlike clan against the new religion, which, he was told had gained ground. He had lost the years in which he might have taken the highest titles in the clan. But some of these things were not irreparable. He was determined that his return should be marked by his people. He would return with a flourish, and regain the seven wasted years. (Achebe 121)

Okonkwo's return to Umuofia resembles the case of regaining the seven baskets. Like the snake that loses and regains her tail, Okonkwo loses his man's place that it is replaced by someone else, and to get titles he leads his clansmen to confront the new religion. Then, after three years, Okonkwo commits suicide because he realizes that the old tradition never comes back as the snake-lizard does.

2.9.6. Okonkwo's suicide

When Okonkwo and his clansmen meet to find a solution to liberate the villages, one of the messengers interrupts them,

He [Okonkwo] sprang to his feet as soon as he saw who it was. He confronted the head messenger, trembling with hate, unable to utter a word. The man stood his ground, his four men lined up behind him... "The white man whose power you know too well has ordered this meeting to stop." In a flash Okonkwo drew his machete. The messenger crouched to avoid the blow. It was useless. Okonkwo's machete descended twice and the man's head lay beside his uniformed body. (Achebe 144)

Before the murder of the messenger, Okonkwo is thinking only to be a man and this becomes one of his flaws that lead to his decline. He swears revenge, "I will fight

alone if I choose" (Achebe 142). At the beginning, Okonkwo fights the changes, and he does not believe in negotiations and that only the power can solve the problem. When Okonkwo kills the messenger court hoping that his clansmen will be behind him, he disappoints by their negative action. So he realizes that the old life never exists, and because he cannot live in a society does not resemble his old society, he decides to hang himself. His fear is to live in a society where there are no titles or privileged status that he works hard to gain his previous status. So he prefers to die than to live in a society that he is not a member from it. His deed has another interpretation which is he wants to recreate the old masculine days of his image.

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

Moreover, the suicide of Okonkwo erases his status in the Ibo society and his individual defense (Irele 36). According to what Chinua Achebe states at the end of the novel, i.e. the District Commissioner has said,

The story of this man who had killed a messenger and hanged himself would make interesting reading. One could almost write a whole chapter on him. Perhaps not a whole chapter but a reasonable paragraph, at any

rate. There was so much else to include, and one must be firm in cutting out details. He had already chosen the title of the book, after much thought: *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger*. (Achebe 147-148)

Since Okonkwo represents the Igbo society, and for the District Commissioner Okonkwo is unimportant person, so the Ibo society as well is worthless.

2.10. The return to nature: harmattan, palm-oil, and yam

In fact, the Africans believe that everything is animated by spirits, and that the man has a strong relation with the land. These two facts are illustrated in the novel. Throughout the novel, we find that Chinua Achebe returns to nature, fauna and flora, to describe the characters or the incidents. The main reason of his return to nature is to show the deep connection between the human life and the land. This criterion is shown in the first page of the novel, "Okonkwo's fame had grown like a bush-fire in the harmattan" (Achebe 3) means Okonkwo's fame has grown rapidly, especially when he defeats Amalinze the Cat.

Moreover, there are other images that are drawn from nature such as, "He [Okonkwo] had been cast out of his clan like a fish onto a dry, sandy beach, panting" (Achebe 92), "[Okonkwo] drank palm-wine from morning till night and his eyes were red and fierce like the eyes of a rat when it was caught by the tail and dashed against the floor" (44), "Among the Ibo the art of conversation is regarded very highly, and proverbs are the palm-oil with which words are eaten" (5), and "Yam stood for manliness, and he could feed his family on yams from one harvest to another was a very great man indeed" (23).

2.11. The significance of worship many gods: Chi and Chukwu

In the Ibo religion, there are a dual deity Chi, personal god, and Chukwu, central

god. According to the novel, Chi god is as a complementary spirit to the characters, and Chukwu has other names Great Chi, Chineke, Supreme Being, and Supreme God (Achebe 126). Thus, Achebe explained, "In Igbo, the name of the Supreme Being is Chukwu which means literally Great Chi and that the name Chineke is used as an alternative to Chukwu" (qtd. in Rooney 188).

According to Ralph Madu, Chi has two meanings. The first meaning simply means 'day' as in 'chi abola', that is, day break, and the second one is personal god as in *Things Fall Apart*, i.e. the spirit that animates the human being which he serves as giver and author of destiny (qtd. in Okoro 59), that is, he agrees on the decisions of the person himself as the case of Okonkwo, "the Ibo people have a proverb that when a man says yes his chi says yes also. Okonkwo said yes very strongly, so his chi agreed"(Achebe 19), but when Okonkwo becomes aggressive his Chi disagrees, so this leads to his downfall ("Culture through Language" 8).

In general, the Chi is responsible for the fortunes and misfortunes of the characters.

2.12. The recurrence of number seven

Throughout the novel, the number seven is repeated many times. For example, Amalinze the Cat is a champion wrestler for seven years (Achebe 3), the sky holds the rain for seven years, *The Cosmic Quarrel*, (38), the reappearance of the locusts is every seven years, *The Locusts Myth* (39), and Okonkwo's exile lasts for seven years in his motherland (87). The most noticeable events happen in the chapter seven: Ikemefuna's execution, the appearance of locusts, and Okonkwo's exile. Undoubtedly, its repetition many times throughout the novel has significance. Perhaps because Achebe is Christian author, and he wants to show the similarities between the Ibo religion and Christianity since the number seven is religiously symbolic number in both religions. According to

the Ibo people, the death has seven causes (Asante and Mazama 464). In Christianity, the number seven is symbolic in the Bible and in the myth of creation ("Study Questions" sec 3).

Moreover, the repetition of number seven is not the only similar between both cultures, but there is another similar which is the marriage. In both societies, the age of bride is between fifteen and eighteen (Obiechina 224). In sum, both societies the European society and the African society are not totally different.

2.12. Conclusion

In sum, the whole events that have been interpreted above summarize the relation of the characters to the downfall of the old Ibo society. Starting from the murder of Ikemefuna which paves the way to change, and puts Okonkwo in a dilemma between his love to the hostage and his fear of being weak, especially it has a great influence on Nwoye in converting Christianity till the death of the protagonist Okonkwo that marks the end of the old Ibo society. Also, his suicide puts many critics in a dilemma if they consider him a hero or anti-hero. Furthermore, the use of Ibo language and tradition gives a Nigerian flavor to the novel.

Chapter Three: The Use of Language in the Novel

3.1. Introduction

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

3.2. Folktales and myths

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

3.2.1. The cosmic quarrel between Sky and Earth

He [Nwoye] remembered the story she [Nwoye's mother] often told of the quarrel between Earth and Sky long ago, and how Sky withheld rain for seven years, until crops withered and the dead could not be buried because the hoes broke on the stony Earth. At last Vulture was sent to plead with Sky, and to soften his heart with a song of the suffering of the sons of men. Whenever Nwoye's mother sang this song he felt carried away to the distant scene in the sky where Vulture, Earth's emissary, sang for mercy. At last Sky was moved to pity, and he gave to Vulture rain wrapped in leaves of coco-yam. But as he flew home his long talon pierced the leaves and the rain fell as it had never fallen before. And so heavily did it rain on Vulture that he did not return to deliver his message but flew to a distant land, from where he had espied a fire. And when he got there he found it was a man making a sacrifice. He warmed himself in the fire and ate the entrails. (Achebe 38)

Nwoye loves this kind of stories that his mother tells him. This myth represents the situation of Okonkwo and his son, Nwoye. As Emmanuel Obiechina stated, "As a metaphor, the myth serves as a number of structural, thematic, and ideological purposes in the novel" (Achebe 208). This myth has three meanings. To compare the myth with the characters, Okonkwo is Sky, and Nwoye is Earth. The first meaning is that the quarrel resembles the unstable situation between Okonkwo and Nwoye. Okonkwo rules his household with a hard hand that leads his family lives in fear. The case of resolving the quarrel between Sky and Earth without the interference of power resembles the case of Nwoye's conversion to Christianity. The second meaning is that both Okonkwo and the Vulture are flawed messengers (207). In the second chapter, Okonkwo is sent to

Mbaino as an emissary of war, but he returns with a lad of fifteen, named Ikemefuna, and a young virgin, but he does not complete his mission because he contributes in Ikemefuna's murder despite the warning of the oldest clansman, Ogbuefi Ezeudu. The Vulture, too, does not complete his mission in bringing rain. According to Obiechina, the quarrel resembles the unequal conflict between Europe and Africa. The Europeans are symbolized by Sky while Ibo people are symbolized by Earth. By taking into consideration the title of the novel, imperialism like a Sky predictably wins (207).

3.2.2. The locusts myth

The elders said locusts came once in a generation, reappeared every year for seven years and then disappeared for another lifetime. They went back to their caves in a distant land, where they were guarded by a race of stunted men. And then after another lifetime these men opened the caves again and the locusts came to Umuofia. (Achebe 38)

In general, the locust swarm symbolizes damage, destruction, and invasion as Emmanuel Obiechina stated, "On the macrocosmic plane, the locust myth prepares us imaginatively, epistemologically, to deal with the phase of European imperialism in this part of Africa. History is elucidated through mythology as locust invasion prefigures imperialist invasion"(209). After three years when Ikemefuna is brought to Umuofia clan as a hostage, a locust swarm descends on the Umuofia village. This means decisive events in the way to Umuofia that lead to the change of Umuofia tradition. The details of the myth summarize the European invasion to the Iboland. At the beginning, the elders give a full description to the myth. In my opinion, the first part where the elders describe the locust myth means the invaders before the coming of the White Men such as Muslims because Islam arrived to South Africa before Christianity.

"Locusts are descending," was joyfully chanted everywhere, and men, women and children left their work or their play and ran into the open to see the unfamiliar sight. The locusts had not come for many, many years, and only the old people had seen them before (Achebe 39). The quotation is as a preamble to the event, i.e. the coming of the White Men

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

"At first, a fairly small swarm came. They were harbingers sent to survey the land" means the first arrivals to the Iboland, Mbaino, who are missionaries to convey and pave the way to the colonizers. Also, "And then appeared on the horizon a slowly-moving mass like a boundless sheet of black cloud drifting towards Umuofia. Soon it covered half the sky, and the solid mass was now broken by tiny eyes of light like shining star-dust" means the colonizer. The rest quotation "It was a tremendous sight, full of power and beauty" explains the strength of the Europeans from weapons and religion, especially the word "beauty" which means the attractions such as education, equal treatment between men and women, and so on. All in all, the coming of the White Men opens a series of events that lead to the fall of the Ibo society, tradition.

3.2.3. Ikemefuna's song

This song is not the whole tale. This song is about a perverse, headstrong king who eats a sacrificial roast yam to the gods, and this deed is taboo. His people sing this song to warn him from the punishment that may destroy himself, his position, and his

reputation (Agatucco 3). The original one is composed of five *sala* instead of two *sala* because it is based on call and response (Obiechina 209).

In the Ibo language:

"Eze elina, elina!

Sala

Eze ilikwa ya

Ikwaba akwa oligholi

Ebe Danda nechi eze

Ebe Uzuzu nete egwu

Sala". (Achebe 42)

In the English language:

"king, do not[it], not eat

Sala [the audience responds]

King, if you eat it

You will weep for the abomination

Where Danda [the white ant] installs king

Where Uzuzu [dust] dances to the drums

Sala. (Agatucco 3)

In my opinion, although Ikemefuna sings this song in his mind, it is indirectly as a warning to Okonkwo to avoid committing another abomination against the earth goddess because his first abomination is breaking the Week of Peace by beating his wife in the third chapter (Achebe 20). Who warns him is the oldest clansman, Ogbuefi Ezeudu, when he visits him to inform him with the decision of the Oracle, and the last two calls predict the suicide of the hero. During his return home, Ikemefuna sings the song and divines if his mother is still alive. According to Obiechina, this song has two directions or ironies. Ogbuefi Ezeudu warns Okonkwo, "That boy calls you father. Do not bear a hand in his death." ... "... But I want you to have nothing to do with it. He calls you his father" (40). So the two directions are. One, is Okonkwo who is warned by the oldest clansman, Ogbuefi Ezeudu, the king who is warned by his people? Two, is Ikemefuna the one who is at risk not his mother?

3.2.4. The mosquito myth

Mosquito ... had asked Ear to marry him, whereupon Ear fell on the floor in uncontrollable laughter. "How much longer do you think you

will live?" she asked. "You are already a skeleton." Mosquito went away humiliated, and anytime he passed her way he told Ear that he was still alive. (Achebe 53)

For the first time in three nights, Okonkwo sleeps, but the mosquitoes bother him. Then, he asks himself, why do they [the mosquitoes] always go for one's ears? (Achebe 53). He remembers the Mosquito Myth that his mother tells when he is a child. In my point of view, there are many interpretations to this myth. First, the mosquito and the ear represent Okonkwo and his father, Unoka. Even his father is weak and irresponsible for him and his family, he remains his father. Second, the mosquito represents the oldest kinsman, Ogbuefi Ezeudu. This man advises him to do nothing in killing Ikemefuna, "That boy calls you my father. Do not bear a hand in his death" (40), but he listens only to his heart to be not weak and besides the advice of Obierika. Moreover, the mosquito symbolizes the hostage Ikemefuna because he always calls Okonkwo his father even he is dying, "My father, they have killed me!" (43). The last interpretation that Obiechina agrees with me is that the mosquito represents Okonkwo's conscience. After killing Ikemefuna, Okonkwo works hard to smooth his conscience, but this fact is the hardest mission since it is not easily killed (211-212). According to Obiechina, the mosquito has other images and metaphors. It represents the resistance of the Ibos to keep alive the everlasting and unconquerable spirit of freedom. Moreover, Okonkwo and the Ibo people resist against colonialism by disturbing its wills and domination. The main interpretation is that *Things Fall Apart* itself can be regarded as anti-colonial discourse (212).

3.2.5. The tortoise and the birds

All the birds were invited to a feast in the sky ... Tortoise saw all these preparations and soon discovered what it all meant. Nothing that

happened in the world of the animals ever escaped his notice,- he was full of cunning. As soon as he heard of the great feast in the sky his throat began to itch at the very thought ... “But he had no wings,” said Ezinma ... he went to the birds and asked to be allowed to go with them. The birds said, "You are full of cunning and you are ungrateful. If we allow you to come with us you will soon begin your mischief.’ “Tortoise had a sweet tongue, and within a short time all the birds agreed that he was a changed man, and they each gave him a feather, with which he made two wings. “There is one important thing which we must not forget,’ he said as they flew on their way. ‘When people are invited to a great feast like this, they take new names for the occasion. Our hosts in the sky will expect us to honor this age-old custom.’ (Achebe 68)

This trickster tale is told by Ekwefi to her daughter Ezinma. So the tale is about birds invited to a feast in the sky. When the cunning tortoise hears about this feast, he asks to join them with giving him feathers. Because the tortoise is very clever and cunning, he asks them to change their names, so he chooses the name *all-of-you*. The name *all-of-you* symbolizes Okonkwo who represents the Ibo society. I share Obiechina's point of view that the story has a didactic meaning since it explains why the tortoise's shell is not smooth. Because of the egoism of the tortoise, he gives his end at the end of the story. The same thing happens to Okonkwo because of his obsession in being strong that leads to his fall in *Things Fall Apart* (213). However, I and Obiechina do not share the same point of view in the following point. According to Obiechina, even Okonkwo is brave, capable, and achiever, he cannot be all-of-you. He cannot represent Umuofia village, and he cannot impose his decisions on the clan (214). For example, when he does an odd deed against Umuofia's will, he is isolated, especially his

killing the court messenger while clansmen are searching for a solution to threat the colonizers. Thus at the end, he left alone which leads him to hang himself.

3.2.6. The Abame story

“Have you heard,” asked Obierika, “that Abame is no more?” “How is that?” asked Uchendu and Okonkwo together. “Abame has been wiped out,” said Obierika. “It is a strange and terrible story. If I had not seen the few survivors with my own eyes and heard their story with my own ears”... “Three moons ago,” said Obierika, “on an Eke market day a little band of fugitives came into our town. Most of them were sons of our land whose mothers had been buried with us. But there were some too who came because they had friends in our town, and others who could think of nowhere else open to escape. And so they fled into Umuofia with a woeful story.”... He continued: “During the last planting season a white man had appeared in their clan.” “An albino,” suggested Okonkwo. “He was not an albino. He was quite different.” ... The elders consulted their Oracle and it told them that the strange man would break their clan and spread destruction among them.” ... “And so they killed the white man and tied his iron horse to their sacred tree because it looked as if it would run away to call the man’s friends ... the Oracle said. It said that other white men were on their way. They were locusts, it said, and that first man was their harbinger sent to explore the terrain. (Achebe 97-98)

Okonkwo leaves his village Umuofia because he kills an innocent person, Ezeudu's son. The crime was female, so the law is to flee for seven years. Obierika and two other young men pay a visit to Okonkwo in his motherland Aninda. Okonkwo and

his maternal uncle receive Obierika and the two young men with palm-wine. Their conversation is about the travels that Uchendu has made. When Uchendu enumerates his travels, and when he mentions the Abame village, Obierika remembers the event of Abame. The story is history or pseudo-history (Obiechina 218). In Obierika's speaking about Abame event, all the features of oral performance are represented. The story symbolizes the strength of the imperialists and the big mistake that the Abame people have committed in killing the white man. Both the locust myth and the Abame story besides the kite myth explain each other, and that the countdown of the Ibo society's fall has begun. All in all, the elders and the oracle are a source of knowledge.

3.2.7. The kite myth (Uchendu's story)

Once sent her daughter to bring food. She went, and brought back a duckling. 'You have done very well,' said Mother Kite to her daughter, 'but tell me, what did the mother of this duckling say when you swooped and carried its child away?' 'It said nothing,' replied the young kite. 'It just walked away.' 'You must return the duckling,' said Mother Kite. 'There is something ominous behind the silence.' And so Daughter Kite returned the duckling and took a chick instead. 'What did the mother of this chick do?' asked the old kite. 'It cried and raved and cursed me,' said the young kite. 'Then we can eat the chick,' said her mother. 'There is nothing to fear from someone who shouts.' (Achebe 98-99)

This myth represents the sign-post coda to the Abame story (Obiechina 218). After a while, Uchendu responds on the Abame story. Before comparing the Abame story and the kite myth, we notice that if Uchendu is present, the killing of the white man does not happen, especially when he said, "Never kill the man who says nothing. Those men of Abame were fools. What did they know about the man? (98) because he

expects the consequences of his death. Uchendu asks Obierika, "What did the man say before they killed him". "He said nothing," answered Obierika's companions. In the kite myth,

"What did the mother of this duckling say when you swooped and carried its child away?" the mother kite said to her daughter. "It is said nothing," replied the young kite. It just walked away.' 'You must return the duckling,' said Mother Kite. 'There is something ominous behind the silence'. (Achebe 99)

Thus the hidden meaning of this myth is that the villagers should not add oil to fire. They should be patient and prepare themselves to anything is expected.

3.2.8. The snake-lizard myth and the expert thieves of Umuike market

Those two narratives have no relation to the thematic discourse and the overall meaning of the novel *Things Fall Apart*. They just enrich the style, and both of them are for entertainment. The first story, Ezinma tells The Snake-Lizard Myth for her mother Ekwefi as an example to how leaves become smaller after cooking which leads the snake-lizard to kill his mother (Achebe 59), and it resembles Okonkwo's exile in the number seven. The second story is a laugh story happens to Obierika when he goes to the market of Umuike in order to sell the goat (79).

3.3. The use of animals and insects in the novel

In prose, the folktales and myths are the main features of the African literature, and what characterizes those stories are the use of animals, trickster animals, instead of human beings in the form of a tortoise, a hare, a rabbit, and a spider. These trickster animals represent the nature and values of man. So these stories are didactic more than entertaining as Obiechina stated, "The story itself is a primary form of the oral tradition, primary as a mode of conveying culture, experience, and value and as a means of

transmitting knowledge wisdom, feeling, and attitudes in oral societies" (qtd. in Accatucu 2). For example, the tale of the mother kite represents the folly of the Abame people. Also, the cunning and the clever tortoise in the tortoise and the birds story represents the wicked of the human beings. All in all, men's and women's stories illustrate male or female values ("The Didactic Animal Tale" 2) as the case of Okonkwo and Ekwefi in *Things Fall Apart*. Ekwefi tells feminine stories for entertainment (Achebe 37,38,53) while Okonkwo recites warfare and bloodshed stories to encourage Nwoye (37).

3.3.1. Local and universal symbols

We take the animals that are mentioned in the folktales and the myths out of their relation or significance to the whole meaning of the novel.

3.3.1.1. Local symbols

3.3.1.1.1. The tortoise

According to the story, the tortoise is a trickster animal character. He is well-known with its cunning, wiliness, mischief, and ungrateful. As the birds say, "You are full of cunning, and you are ungrateful. If we allow you to come with us you will soon begin your mischief." Moreover, he is well-known in travelling "Tortoise ... was a widely travelled man who knew the customs of different peoples" (Achebe 68).

3.3.1.1.2. The birds

In the story of the tortoise and birds, the birds represent naivety and less intelligence because they fall in the tortoise's tricks twice. The first trick is their belief that the tortoise has changed and becomes a good man (Achebe 68). The second trick is when he gives himself the name *all-of-you* (68). However, at the end, the parrot takes revenge (69).

3.3.1.1.3. The mosquito

According to the Mosquito Myth, the mosquito means conscience or conscience stricken because he always reminds the ear that he is still alive, "Any time he passed her way he told the Ear that he was still alive" (Achebe 53).

3.3.1.2. Universal symbols

3.3.1.2.1. The vulture

In the myth the Cosmic Quarrel between Sky and Earth, the vulture is Earth emissary seeking for mercy, that is, he symbolizes peace, mercy, and fertility. Besides John Buchanan-Brown stated, "In Africa ... the vulture is a symbol of fertility and plenty on every level of wealth, both spiritual and material" (1074).

3.3.1.2.2. The locusts

In Christian symbolism, locusts swarm represents the forces of destruction; scourge (Cirlot 190). The same thing is in the African culture, especially what happens to the Ibo society after the coming of the White Men. The Igbo tradition is totally destroyed.

3.4. Proverbs

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

of Okonkwo to his mother land, Aninta, Uchendu says to Okonkwo, "When a father beats his child, it seeks sympathy in its mother's hut. A man belongs to his father land when things are good and life is sweet. But when there is sorrow and bitterness he finds refuge in his mother land" (94). As it is said, "Proverbs have been an efficiently used throughout the story to depict on how respect honestly, loyalty and courtesy could affect the lives of the Igbos in good way ("How Folk Literature Applies to T F A" 3). In sum, the Ibo's proverbs are a sophisticated art that show how the Ibo society is civilized.

3.5. Colors

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

3.5.1. Red

In Black Africa, women and girls paint themselves with special colors that have a meaning. In *Things Fall Apart*, when the suitor of Obierika's daughter is coming to take her, i.e. marriage, she paints her face and her body by using special colors as Chinua Achebe said,

She wore a coiffure which was done up into a crest in the middle of the head. Cam wood was rubbed lightly into her skin, and all over her body were black patterns drawn with *uli*. She wore a black necklace which hung down in three coils just above her full, succulent breasts. On her arms were red and yellow bangles, and on her waist four or five rows of *jigida*, or waist beads. (49)

This passage contains almost all the colors. For example, red symbolizes protection as John Buchanan-Brown stated in its book *Dictionary of Symbols*, "Red dye ... with which women and girls in Black Africa paint their faces and bodies after the

taboo following their first menstruation has been lifted, on the eve of their first marriage, or after the birth of their first child" (794).

3.5.2. White

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

3.6. The significance of such words and expressions

3.6.1. Fire

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

3.6.2. Yam

Yam is The Ibo king crop. Always in return to the novel, we notice that yam has three symbols. The first is a sign of wealth, and the most appropriate example is "He [Okonkwo] was a wealthy farmer and had two barns full of yams" (Achebe 5). The second symbol is masculinity. When Okonkwo asks Nwakibie, a wealthy man in Okonkwo's clan, to help him with yams, "I know what it is to ask a man to trust another with his yams, especially these days when young men are afraid of hard work. I am not

afraid of work" (15). He continues, "I began to fend for myself at an age when most people still suck at their mothers' breasts. If you give me some yam seed I shall not fail you" (16). Those two quotations show Okonkwo's masculinity, and Nwakibie shares me this point. Nwakibie clears his throat:

"It pleases me to see a young man like you these days when our youth have gone so soft. Many young men have come to me to ask for yams but I have refused because I knew they would just dump them in the earth and leave them to be choked by weeds," he continues, "But I can trust you. I know it as I look at you ... I shall give you twice four hundred yams". (Achebe 16)

From the two symbols above, we deduce the third symbol which is the ability as a provider ("Yam" sec 2). If a man is wealthy, he can provide all facilities to his family from food, protection, and so on. All in all, Achebe states, "Yam stood for manliness, and he who could feed his family on yams from one harvest to another was a great man indeed" (23). This quotation summarizes the three symbols above.

3.6.3. Having wives and children

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

3.6.4. Ash

Ash is a symbol of lifelessness, impotence, and calm ("Ash" sec 5). Ash is used twice. The first is when Okonkwo resembles his son Nwoye with ash. He says, "Living fire [Okonkwo] begets cold, impotent ash [Nwoye]" (Achebe 109). The second is the

nickname of the court messengers Ashy Buttocks because of their ash-colored shorts, but they are arrogant and high-handed (123).

3.6.5. The egwugwu

The egwugwu are masked dancers who impersonate the ancestors of Umuofia village and the ancestral gods. Their role is to solve the problems by judge, i.e. they serve as a court. For example, the case of Uzowulu and his wife Mgbafo. So they are a symbol of the culture, the independence, and the spirit of Umuofia ("The Egwugwu" sec 4). However, after the arrival of the white man, the egwugwu are replaced by the court messengers, so their symbolic culture and independence are lost ("The Egwugwu" sec 4).

3.6.6. The mother of the spirits

The mother of the spirits is the deity that Umuofia village worships. She is seen as the mother to the egwugwu. Once, one of the Christian converts unmasks one of the egwugwu. This act resembles the death of god, but the mother of the spirits does not take revenge. It just weeps upon the loss of her son. ("The Mother of the Spirits" sec 3)

3.6.7. Kola

Kola nut is an indispensable drink at West Africa in the formal and informal social gatherings. Throughout the novel, we find expressions that give a symbolic function to kola. For example, Okoye says, "who brings kola brings life" (Achebe 15) means prosperity and continuity, and "the kola was given to him [Unoka] and he prayed to the ancestors ... He then broke the kola and threw one of the lobes on the ground for the ancestors" (5) breaking and sharing of kola symbolizes unity (Killam 26). Also, sharing the kola between the Ibos represents love, peace, greeting and kindness as, "I [Okonkwo] beg you [kinsmen] to accept this little kola," he said. "It is not to pay you

back for all you did for me in these seven years. A child cannot pay for its mother's milk. I have only called you together because it is good for kinsmen to meet" (Achebe 117).

3.6.8. The machete

The machete is the main war tool in the Ibo society besides the gun. It is a symbol of prowess, masculinity, and defense. For example, "you, Unoka, are known in all the clan for the weakness of your machete and your hoe" (Achebe 13) means he is not powerful and masculine man. Moreover,

"Thus the men of Umuofia pursued their way, armed with sheathed machetes, and Ikemefuna, carrying a pot of palm-wine on his head,"..." As the man who had cleared his throat drew up and raised his machete" ... "He [Okonkwo] heard Ikemefuna cry, "My father, they have killed me!" as he ran towards him. Dazed with fear, Okonkwo drew his machete and cut him [Ikemefuna] down. He was afraid of being thought weak." (Achebe 42-43)

The machete is used in killing Ikemefuna, and Okonkwo kills him to show his masculinity. Also, Okonkwo asks Obierika why the Abame people do not arm themselves with guns and machetes (Achebe 99). Besides it has another symbol which is a symbol of male aggression (Stratton 30).

3.6.9. The sacred silk-cotton tree

It is an Abame totem which symbolizes protection. According to the novel, after the elders of Abame consult their oracle, they kill the white man, and tie his iron horse, bicycle, to their sacred tree, The Silk-Cotton Tree, for protection and stop the evil as Obierika says, " they killed the white man and tied his iron horse to their sacred tree because it looked as if it would run away to call the man's friends" (Achebe 97). In

Addition, "Spirits of good children lived in that tree waiting to be born. On ordinary days young women who desired children came to sit under its shade" (33).

3.6.10. Twins

Twins are symbol of devil and curse. Thus, the Ibo people throw the twins into the bush (Peek and Yankah 54). For that, in the novel, the Umuofian people throw the twins in the bush, the Evil Forest; "Nwoye had heard that twins were put in earthenware pots and thrown away in the forest" (Achebe 43). The recent scientific researches ensured that the cause of bringing twins in South Africa is mainly because of yams. This latter contains an acid called *negodotropine*. This means that the Ibos believe in superstitions such as the case of Ekwefi, "She hit her left foot against an outcropped root, and terror seized her. It was an ill omen" (72). Also, there is another example, "When the moon rose late in the night, people said it was refusing food, as a sullen husband refuses his wife's food when they have quarreled" (74).

3.6.11. Drums

Drums are used in ceremonies and rituals such as in the wrestling of Okonkwo with Amalinze the Cat, "The drums beat and the flutes sang and the spectators held their breath" (Achebe 3) this quotation means that the drums are symbol of culture. In addition, the drums are a symbol of psychological warfare (Buchanan- Brown 319), culture and unity. As a symbol of culture is stated in *Things Fall Apart*, "Just then the distant beating of drums began to reach them. It came from the direction of the *ilo*, the village playground. Every village had its own *ilo* which was as old as the village itself and where all the great ceremonies and dances took place" (Achebe 30), and as symbol of unity and warfare (7-8).

3.8. Conclusion

Chinua Achebe is like an architect in writing his novel *Things Fall Apart*. Through his use of language and the Igbo culture, he enables us to experience the previous life of the Ibo people. Thus, he gave a great importance to the first part of the novel, before the coming of the white man, where he has used most of the symbolic items. In this part, he described the Ibo life living in harmony and balance and their functional culture in order to understand the behaviors of the protagonist Okonkwo and the Ibos as a whole. In sum, there is an intimate relationship between the items and their symbolic function and interpretation.

General Conclusion

Symbolism is an aesthetic movement began in France in the nineteenth century. It came as a continuation of the romantic tradition and as a reaction to realism and naturalism. The symbolist movement had its beginnings in the poetry of Charles Pierre Baudelaire: *The Flowers of Evil* (1857) and *Paris Spleen* (1859). He encouraged the writers to express and represent their ideas, feelings, and values through symbols and allusions rather than through direct statements. Moreover, there were three notable French authors whose works of poetry associated with the symbolist movement. Those authors are Stéphane Mallarmé, Arthur Rimbaud, and Paul Verlaine. Then, the movement spread out of France in the works of the Belgian author and playwright Maurice Maeterlinck.

Through my deep analysis to the novel *Things Fall Apart* from one literary aspect which is the function of symbolism, I found that Chinua Achebe used symbolism as the main element in writing the novel for the overall meaning. Also, he gives a great importance to the first part where he has used the most symbolic items since he describes the Ibo society, before the arrival of the White Man, living in harmony and balance. Thus, his work is considered as a model of the African literature and to other English and African writers. Moreover, his work is used in non-literary fields such as history, anthropology, human science, etc because he describes the history, culture and the tradition of the African society.

Above all, Chinua Achebe has chosen a suitable title to his novel that is borrowed from W.B. Yeats's poem *The Second Coming* (1921). So the title means that when a society accumulates injustice, that is, killing innocence, it is naturally forced to vanish. Furthermore, the most noticeable criterion of his work is the use of language from Ibo words and phrases, proverbs, storytelling, myths and other elements of oral

tradition. The use of folktales and myths help in understanding the whole meaning of the novel. For example, *The Cosmic Quarrel between Sky and Earth* represents the conflict between both cultures the African culture and the European one. In addition, *The Snake-Lizard Story* that is similar to Okonkwo's exile and suicide. Hence, his use of the folktales and myths is important.

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

Moreover, there are some events that lead to the decline of the Ibo society. Since Okonkwo represents the Ibo society, his decline means the decline of the whole society. The main characters who have a great affect in the decline of the protagonist are the hostage, Ikemefuna, and his son, Nwoye. Okonkwo commits mistakes that lead to his downfall. First of all, he commits an abomination against the Earth goddess Ani by breaking the week peace, taking a hand in Ikemefuna's murder, and killing by mistake Ezeudu's son. This latter marks his exile, and at the same time is the arrival of the White Man. All these incidents are the beginning of his downfall, and more specifically when he returns to Umuofia village after seven years. His return to the village accelerates the death of the old Ibo society because he cannot live in a society differs his old society. The Europeans bring with them all what is a new: a new religion, economy, customs and traditions, and social structure.

Finally, the death of Okonkwo, the representative of the Ibo society, points the death of the old Ibo society.

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