

THE ABYSS OF MEANING: DISENCHANTMENT IN CHINUA ACHEBE'S *THINGS FALL APART*

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Abstract

Achebe's magnum opus, *Things Fall Apart*, circles around a Nigerian community and the life of the Ibo people. It illustrates the life of local people before and after the British colonisation. The novel gives an account of Okonkwo's life as a highly valued member of an Ibo clan, during the colonisation period. In this article, I intend to argue that the life of this clan was enchanted before colonisation. Later, I seek to elaborate on how this enchanted life is affected by Western civilisation and Christianity and how these elements disenchant the Ibo people's worldview. The liveliness of matter for Ibo people and the immateriality of objects for Christians contributed to two opposing ontologies. While Western ontology seeks to define, limit, and measure everything, the Ibo tradition gives space to the elements of magic, wonder, and fear. The sheer forces of Western rationality and Christianity served as potent elements that drained the Ibo culture of meaning. Furthermore, I posit that the emergence of Western tradition within Ibo culture caused Okonkwo's suicide and identity crises.

Keywords: *Things Fall Apart*, Chinua Achebe, enchantment, disenchantment, Christianity, rationality.

EL ABISMO DEL SIGNIFICADO: DESENCANTAMIENTO EN *THINGS FALL APART* DE CHINUA ACHEBE

Resumen

La obra maestra de Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, gira en torno a una comunidad nigeriana y la vida de la gente Ibo. Ilustra la vida de la población local antes y después de la colonización británica. La novela narra la vida de Okonkwo, un miembro altamente valorado del clan Ibo, durante el período de colonización. En este artículo, pretendo

argumentar que la vida de este clan estaba encantada antes de la colonización. Luego, analizo cómo esa vida encantada se ve afectada por la civilización occidental y el cristianismo y cómo esos elementos desencantaron la visión del mundo de los Ibo. La vitalidad de la materia para los Ibo y la inmaterialidad de los objetos para los cristianos contribuyeron a dos ontologías opuestas. Mientras que la ontología occidental busca definir, limitar y medir todo, la tradición Ibo da espacio a los elementos de magia, maravilla y miedo. Las puras fuerzas de la racionalidad occidental y el cristianismo sirvieron como elementos potentes que vaciaron de significado la cultura Ibo. Además, sostengo que la aparición de la tradición occidental dentro de la cultura Ibo causó el suicidio de Okonkwo y su crisis de identidad.

Palabras clave: *Things Fall Apart*, Chinua Achebe, encantamiento, desencantamiento, cristianismo, racionalidad.

1. INTRODUCTION

The publication of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1959) contributed to the emergence of modern African fiction and post-colonial theory and practice. Achebe is a pioneer in elaborating on the colonial and post-colonial conditions of African people throughout his works. *Things Fall Apart*, in particular, epitomises hostile cultural encounters which result in the domination of the local African culture. The subordination of the Ibo people by the Christian freemasonries entails «a complex dialectical relationship» (Msiska, 2009: 172), which engenders not only «the opposition to the new ideas and the new religion» (Leach, 1971: 1054) but also destabilises the Ibo epistemology by threatening and eventually eradicating indigenous knowledge systems. Animism which is «the earliest religious condition of humankind» (Wilkinson, 2016: 290) is an essential pillar of the Ibo tradition which attributes soul to inanimate objects. Animism «was used to justify Euro-western invasion and domination of Indigenous lands throughout the world» (Merewether, 2023: 21), and in this novel, the colonial discourse emerges through undermining animism.

Achebe's depiction of the narrative is divided into three sections which «reflected and focused on the pre-and post-colonial African society» (Fawole, 2018: 14). The encounter of local culture with an imperialist culture which is invigorated by military, religious, and scientific means to assert its superiority not only enslaved the Ibo people

but also shattered their understanding of the universe. The sudden shift in Ibo's ontology morphed into an identity crisis for the hero of Achebe's narrative, Okonkwo. Additionally, the westernisation of the African communities did not take place without any costs and negative impacts. The encounter of two opposing epistemological mindsets asserts that the novel «is not simply a transparent or straightforward narrative» (Procter, 2009: 190), rather it challenges the collision of two epistemological views, and in this sense, it portrays the collapse of a universe and its absorption into another.

Achebe's representation of the Ibo people is not one of idealism or utopia. Rather, Achebe demonstrates an awareness of the imperfections inherent in the fictional Nigerian clan of Umuofia. Nonetheless, he endeavors to establish a characterisation of these individuals by creating distance between himself and the narrative. Some scholars assert that in the course of the novel, «history is replicated with stunning accuracy» (Ouzgane & Okome, 2009: 137) in relation to the subordination and domination of African communities in the age of colonisation. The narrative barely sympathises with these soon-to-be colonised people. By simply narrating the story, Achebe «presents a world which is shedding nostalgic tears of the lost identity, a world which finds itself on the verge of getting sealed in the dusted files of a forgotten history» (Maleki & Navidi, 2011: 12). The story revolves around Okonkwo's life and experiences from a young age until he commits suicide. It is through his life and experiences that the readers come to understand better the social structure of these people as «[m]ost of the values that Okonkwo exhibits and cherishes are also cherished by his society» (Wafula & Wanjala, 2017: 64). What remains quite controversial, however, is the reason why Okonkwo, as the epitome of valour, decides to commit suicide, which is, in his people's view «an abomination for a man» (Achebe, 1994: 207). In this study, I argue how the death of Okonkwo is the result of a «modernity that disqualified African societies» (West-Pavlov, 2022: 72), by disenchanting an enchanted world through Western scientific and religious lenses.

In the portrayal of Achebe's characterisation, Okonkwo is depicted as an antihero by virtue of his misogynistic tendencies, proclivity for violence, and perpetual state of anger. Notwithstanding, Okonkwo is demonstrated as resilient to novelty and his internal turmoil remains

unsettled, as he appears steadfastly committed to the value system of his forebears. The novel's inaugural section represents a world imbued with enchantment and traces the gradual erosion of this enchantment at the hands of Western rationalisation and in this sense, it should not be considered «a classic of African literature but indeed of world literature» (Okunoye, 2010: 44) since the Western epistemology made use of a master model to disenchant and colonise the other cultures. As Salami and Hekmatshoar (2018: 25) point out, *Things Fall Apart* narrates «the story of the downfall or shattering of old values and traditions by the arrival of the new value systems». The impact of these emergent values, in my contention, is to unsettle Okonkwo's belief in his traditional values and the societal framework within which he attained renown and prestige. Okonkwo epitomises the autochthonous individual whose faith is disrupted and whose scepticism precludes acceptance of the novel value system. The imperial, in this sense, did «reframe and reorganize the order of knowledge in a way that suppressed, displaced, and/or destabilized indigenous knowledge constructs while enshrining European ones» (Mengara, 2019: 43). The epistemological shift resides deeply in the perception of reality through the Western understanding of logic and reason. In order to establish itself as the primary and superior source of access to reality, Western rationalisation challenges and disqualifies any other ontology.

The incarnation of metaphysical and magical is abundant in the context of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. In a new materialist sense, the novel illuminates «a turn toward matter and against linguistic, cultural and discursive turns» (Jovanović, 2021: 246), which, however, exemplifies the vulnerability of this shift of worldview. The Ibo culture does not envisage an anthropocentric worldview. On the contrary, «human aims and goals are decentered» (Leonard, 2020: 2) or at least, are in harmony with the environment. Within this article, my aim is to explicate the influence of these objects upon the Ibo people's faith and comprehension of the cosmos. I contend that the Ibo have an intimate rapport with the natural world, which forms the basis of their religion and incarnates it. Specific objects function as active agents in shaping the fate of these individuals. As Irele (2000: 6) asserts, «the culture of Umuofia as depicted by Achebe functions through an immanence of its foundational myth in the collective life and consciousness». Through

vibrant matters, Ibo society is organised and structured which proposes that «the spirit world is not far from [the] physical world» (Ansah & Segbefia, 2022: 40), and the incarnation of immaterial takes place within the material. The collision of objects and myth makes the culture vulnerable by challenging the metaphysical aspects of objects which contributes to the metanarrative of Umuofia through the Western metanarrative of rationalisation. The objectification of «spiritual or divine agencies» (Bokotiabato Mokogna, 2019: 140), such as *egwugwu* elaborates on the visibility of the metaphysical world in the Ibo tradition. Another instance is the kola nut which «has great cultural value in fulfilling socio-religious functions» (Kammampool & Laar, 2019: 26). The presence of matter signifies the «vitality in things» (Bennett, 2004: 348) which is absent in the Western tradition.

2. NEW MATERIALISM AND THE POETICS OF ENCHANTMENT

The philosophical and political body of New Materialism seeks to redefine the significance of non-human agents in the human world. What has been forgotten or ignored in studies prior to New Materialism is «the entanglements between and among human and non-human» (Hohmann, 2021: 587) and the effects they possess upon one another. The Western ontology presents a dualism of nature and culture in which «nature has continually been the preferred sign (symbol, code) for the justification of authority» (Bennett & Chaloupka, 1993: 5). There is a need in the Western tradition to define and limit everything including nature and its effects and in order to define nature, the Western ontology naturalises nature as an inert entity in need of humanitarian protection and conversely, exploitation. The Western tradition embodies and supports an arborescent worldview which seeks to unify and homogenise everything to present and represent one unified calculable world which corresponds to the Western dualisms and epistemological views. In her philosophical book, *Vibrant Matter*, Bennett (2010: 6) challenges this viewpoint by elaborating on a critical term she names thing-power which is «the curious ability of inanimate things to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle». Bennett offers a rhizomatic substitute which magnifies the importance of organic and inorganic bodies that directly contribute to the lives of themselves and societies. Bennett (2010:

10) proposes that the subject/object dichotomy must be nullified and replaced by an actant, that is «neither an object nor a subject but an intervener». In this sense, actants are not only humans but organic and inorganic entities that take part in a more ecologically sustainable viewpoint.

Things Fall Apart illustrates an indigenous African viewpoint that cherishes the relationships and experiences between people and materiality. Bennett (2010: 20) asserts that thing-power «draws attention to an efficacy of objects in excess of the human meanings, designs or purposes they express or serve»: that is a world in which meaning can be created by the way of matter. The reason why the Western tradition fails to consider matter as a vital actant is because it fails to understand the efficacy of matter in everyday life. Moreover, «matter was not in principle calculable: something always escaped quantification, prediction, and control» (Bennett, 2010: 63). The unpredictability of matter accounts for the enchanted world which excites humans when exposed to the natural world. Bennett's analyses represent «the capacity of humans to be 'enchanted' by matter and the natural world» (Neff, 2020: 2); however, this capability is highly restricted by the Western ontology which portrays «the things of our world as mute, brute matter» (Goble, 2017: 71). To be enchanted, in Bennett's viewpoint, «is to be struck and shaken by the extraordinary that lives amid the familiar and the everyday» (Bennett, 2001: 4). Bennett's term is rather complex and difficult to define. Bennett's definition of enchantment is very close to the romantic sublime in which both fear and wonder are accompanied by «a mood of fullness, plenitude, or liveliness» (Bennett, 2001: 5). Bennett proposes a set of features which result in enchantment and also a set of characteristics which has disenchanted the modern world.

Bennett's worldview of the Western tradition describes a world in which «everything, in principle, is calculable and disenchanted» (Ramsay, 2009: 198); it is a world which gives way to no magical or unpredictable events, and everything is regularised or predestined. Disenchantment, in Bennett's studies, originated from considering «non-human nature as more or less inert» (Bennett, 2001: 7) and incapable of contributing to the existence and condition of itself and humans. As a result of disenchantment, we encounter a form of ontological crisis which leads to «the loss of contact with a meaningful moral universe»

(Bennett, 2001: 8). The disenchanted milieu assumes sole culpability for the object/subject dichotomy, whereby objects are delimited vis-à-vis subjects. Objects, therefore, are not regarded as actants, but rather, are classified by their efficacy in fulfilling human objectives. Those that do not align with the interests of subjects are wholly expunged or disregarded. Thus, moral responsibility becomes a figment for non-human actants, given that their only *raison d'être* is to cater to the needs of subjects. Bennett's definition of enchantment entails «the somatic correlate of a view of nature as somehow linked to divinity» (Bennett, 2001: 49); it is a world in which magic still exists. The enchanted world escapes discipline and predictability and for Bennett, the matter is «recalcitrant, encountering human subjects as out-side conceptual determination» (Van Wyk, 2012: 131). The predictability of the environment contributes to the tale of disenchantment.

The problem that Bennett finds with contemporary societies is that the world has become «highly rationalised... characterised by calculation [and] stands in stark contrast to a magical or holistic cosmos» (Bennett, 2001: 57). Bennett is not entirely ignorant of the plus points of modernity; however, she argues that «we pay a psychic or emotional toll for demagnification in the form of a lack of community and a deficit of meaning» (Bennett, 2001: 57); and in this sense, the Western culture has paid enormously to bear the name of being modern. Lack of meaning becomes a significant aspect of modernity as rationalisation «inspires both hope and despair» (Bennett, 2001: 57). Despair is the result of a nostalgia that modern people feel about a mythical and wonderful past in which predictability was less precise. The present discourse aims to explicate the congruence between Achebe's literary oeuvre, *Things Fall Apart*, and Bennett's theoretical framework of enchantment, despite potential deviations. Specifically, this article will illuminate the salient features that contribute to the enchantment within the realm of Okonkwo's community, while simultaneously elaborating on how this enchanted domain succumbs to complete disenchantment in the wake of Western cultural infiltration, which not only colonizes the land but also discredits local epistemologies.

3. BEFORE THINGS FELL APART: THE ENCHANTED WORLD OF OKONKWO

In the first part of the novel, Achebe's main concern is «the portrayal of the social, political and religious life of Umuofia, the Igbo village to which Okonkwo belongs» (Innes, 1990: 22-23). The significance of the Ibo people's association with nature cannot be overstated when attempting to grasp the principles of enchantment within their culture. Furthermore, the incalculability that pervades the narrative reinforces a sense of ambiguity and awe that engenders an enchanted experience. Achebe's portrayal of Okonkwo's community demonstrates the existence of enchantment in their culture, not in the sense of supernatural occurrences, but rather as a manifestation of the inexplicable. An enchanted realm is one that can perpetually astonish its inhabitants by evoking feelings of bewilderment and perplexity. Umuofia, Okonkwo's community «was powerful in war and magic, and its priests and medicine men were feared in all the surrounding country» (Achebe, 1994: 11). Okonkwo and Ibo people did not seek to dominate and colonise the environment. The relationship between these people and the environment is based on respect and understanding. This respect basically stems from a sense of fear while encountering their surroundings; «the fear of evil and capricious gods and of magic, the fear of the forest, and the forces of nature, malevolent, red in tooth and claw» (Achebe, 1994: 13) are some of the issues that petrify these people. The presence of the element of surprise and the fear of the unknown is prevalent in Ibo culture. Bennett (2001: 104) proposes that «enchantment is provoked by surprise [and] surprise itself includes both a pleasant, charming feeling, and a slightly off-putting sense of having been disrupted». When encountered by the vastness and unpredictability of their surroundings, Ibo people feel the necessity of being adaptive to the forces of nature rather than enslaving these forces by the means of modern science. The presence of magic «accommodates enchantment as the epitome of wonder» (Curry, 2012: 77), and through wonder, these people feel part of a greater circle of existence rather than its makers.

The Ibo culture appears not to be even slightly tainted by Western tradition. As Korang (2011: 16) argues, the novel is «a portrait of a self-made African socio-historical and socio-cultural order, finely tuned by its (collective) makers to be responsive to their human needs, their

existential hungers, and their deepest metaphysical yearnings». The customs and practices of this society are predicated upon a concordance with their surroundings; nevertheless, the society is conspicuously deficient in its humanitarian ethos, as gender equality is absent, and women endure pervasive subjugation. Furthermore, certain rituals, such as the mutilation of infants, are commonplace. Another cornerstone of enchantment in this context is an unshakable belief in the immeasurable or unforeseeable. Faith is incarnated in objects; «near the barn was a small house, 'the medicine house' or shrine where Okonkwo keep the wooden symbols of his personal god and of his ancestral spirits» (Achebe, 1994: 14). The presence of an oracle is another enchanting issue which is central to the faith of individuals and the clan. Since the oracle does not enforce a fixed set of rules, it can always baffle and petrify its subjects. «The oracle was called Agbala, and people came from far and near to consult it» (Achebe, 1994: 16). Achebe later portrays the significance of this god in the clan; he asserts, «worshippers and those who came to seek knowledge from the god crawled on their belly through the hole and found themselves in a dark, endless space in the presence of Agbala» (Achebe, 1994: 16). Following this representation, it can be noted that «man-made complexities also can provoke wonder, surprise, and disorientation» (Bennett, 2001: 171). Agbala transforms into a symbol of a human-crafted object that elicits both trepidation and admiration, and «no one who had ever crawled into his awful shrine had come out without the fear of his power» (Achebe, 1994: 16). It was not only the presence of Agbala which enchanted these people; however, many elements including natural and cultural entities were able to enchant these people. Achebe (1994: 17) states that «sometimes a man came to consult the spirit of his dead father or relative». While none of these accounts affirm any direct encounter with the magical element, their effects on Ibo's lives are enormous.

It appears that gods, humans, and nature are directly intertwined, and their destinies are connected to each other. Because of this connection, there exists harmony in the lives of Ibo people with their surroundings. Life is embodied in nature and man-made artefacts. This connection brings a sense of universal purpose and meaning to all the lives in Ibo culture. The presence of «chi or personal god» (Achebe, 1994: 18) and the effects it has on individuals is another example of this universal

connection. Okonkwo's success and elevation from a son of a poor, untitled man to one of Umuofia's greatest people and later, his exile represents the significance of this personal god. Achebe refers to a famous local proverb which asserts that «when a man says yes, his chi says yes also» (Achebe, 1994: 27). The mutual impact that man has over nature and vice versa confirms the union and harmony between humans and their environment. The significance of Ibo culture lies in the immediate encounter of human and non-human entities. Unlike Christianity which later offers reward and punishment for people in the afterlife, the Ibo religion identifies immediate consequences of the encounter between humans and the divine. When Okonkwo falsely beats his wife in the Week of Peace, a priest reproaches him by stating that «the earth goddess whom you have insulted may refuse to give us her increase, and we shall all perish» (Achebe, 1994: 30). As a result of his offence against gods, Okonkwo was obliged to dedicate «one she-goat, one hen, a length of cloth, and a hundred cowries» (Achebe, 1994: 31). Punishment for the crimes and offences against gods were set by priests and priestesses and they varied according to their likes and dislikes. These lifeless objects were given life since they were both feared and revered.

Another entity which is dynamic as the members of the clan is the Evil Forest. In this forest lies all the abomination of the clan. The mutilated bodies, the murdered twins, the sick and dying, and those who die during the week of peace are all cast into this Evil Forest. The narration of Achebe in this novel asserts that «African people are not inhuman or uncivilized, they are just different from Western people» (Okuroğlu Özün & Baskale, 2019: 92), and this difference lies in the way they perceive the world around them. The presence of so many elements which directly contribute to the lives of people is a powerful source of enchantment. The Feast of New Yam in which people appreciate «Ani, the earth goddess and the source of fertility» (Achebe, 1994: 36) resembles another example of how significant and dynamic matters are. Bennett's argument does not propose worshipping idols as a source of enchantment. The Ibo religion inadvertently enchants people by imposing feelings of wonder and fear. What is considered to be superstition for the Western man is a source of meaning, inspiration, and wonder for the Ibo people. The modern man has grown very suspicious

of whatever he encounters and finding a source of meaning which can be reliable is almost impossible for him who always doubts.

Unlike Western culture, the Ibo culture has not «been demystified by science» (Saler, 2006: 692), since the Ibo's understanding of the universe is not calculable. The oracles appear to have their own independent ways which must be followed by the people. For instance, the murder of the innocent, son-like young Ikemefuna was pronounced by «the Oracle of the Hills and Caves» (Achebe, 1994: 57), and despite Okonkwo's reluctance to contribute to this prophesy, he eventually yielded to this painful occurrence. The incalculability and indefiniteness of knowledge in Ibo tradition assert enchantment. As Dube (2002: 729) points out, «the advent of modernity, then, insinuates the disenchantment of the world». The account of Okonkwo's wife whose children all died at an early age and the quest of Okonkwo to find a remedy illuminates how magic is intertwined with local knowledge. After seeking help from professional medicine men, Okonkwo was told that «the child was an *ogbanje*, one of those wicked children who, when they died, entered their mothers' wombs to be born again» (Achebe, 1994: 77). The remedies suggested by different medicine men in Okonkwo's clan were not certain. The presence of *Ogbanje* within Ibo culture serves as a captivating entity, instilling both a sense of awe and trepidation within its observers.

Enchantment also stems from a lack of certainty which later gives way to feelings of wonder and curiosity. The fact that the world is full of wonders and that everything is not calculable or predestined ensures the feeling of enchantment. It is in this world that Okonkwo prospered and made his way through all difficulties and hardships. The worlds of magic, gods, Evil Forest, ancestor's spirit, and oracles were very dynamic and active in the lives of the people and Okonkwo. This world was enchanted and the source of meaning and faith in this clan and society was stable. This is unlike what modernity, Western knowledge, and Christianity could offer to these people.

4. WHEN THINGS FELL APART: ENFORCING WESTERN ONTOLOGY

Chapter fourteen marks the initiation of colonialization in the latter section of the novel. Owing to the inadvertent killing of a fellow

clansman, Okonkwo was obliged to leave his tribe for a period of seven years and sought sanctuary in his maternal homeland. The resulting predicament had a profound and negative impact on Okonkwo, significantly altering his disposition. He ruminated that «his personal god or chi was not made for great things» (Achebe, 1994: 131), and that his destiny was intertwined with his chi. Okonkwo's friend, Obierika, was the harbinger of the terrible news. «“Have you heard”, asked Obierika, “that Abame is no more?”» (Achebe, 1994: 137). A white man, the symbol of modernisation and Christianity enters Abame to investigate the life of these people; however, «the elders consulted their Oracle, and it told that the strange man would break their clan and spread destruction among them» (Achebe, 1994: 138). The reliability of the oracle which was still highly trusted warns these people against the coming ideology which disenchantments their world. The Oracle appears to be reliable since it later prognosticates that «other white men were on their way» (Achebe, 1994: 138), and certainly, other white men came along and destroyed the clan entirely. Chapter sixteen of the novel introduces the presence of missionaries in Okonkwo's clan. His friend Obierika visits Okonkwo after two years, and by that time «the missionaries had come to Umuofia. They had built their church there, won a handful of converts and were already sending evangelists to the surrounding towns and villages» (Achebe, 1994: 143). The presence of Christianity is the inauguration of disenchantment with Ibo ideology. Bennett (2001: 61) argues that «modern religions have been moving away from magic and toward ethical strategies of salvation». The encounter of the Ibo religion with Christianity is significant since the victor of this battle determines whose god is more reliable. The Ibo people «believed that the strange faith and the white man's god would not last» (Achebe, 1994: 143), and in the beginning, only socially inferior individuals in the clan converted.

In contrast to Christianity, which places a great emphasis on the concept of an afterlife, Okonkwo's religious beliefs are materialistic in nature, and are vulnerable to various Christian discourses that aim to discredit them. Following a discourse with a missionary, the Ibo people made an effort to comprehend the perspective of Christianity. The first task that the missionary takes is to devalue the material religion; «he told them that they worshipped false gods, gods of wood and stone» (Achebe, 1994: 145). The dialogue that was established between the people and the

missionary challenged the materiality of the Ibo religion. When one of the Ibo people asks if they will remain unharmed from the wrath of their own gods by converting to Christianity, the missionary replies, «your gods are not alive and cannot do you any harm... they are pieces of wood and stone» (Achebe, 1994: 146). Matter is indeed only lifeless for Christians and the understanding of the universe that Ibo culture provides seems to be blasphemous. Hence, these missionaries are «ascribed a central role in the collapse of Igbo culture» (Searle, 2007: 52) since matter must remain dead. By proving the lifelessness of matter, the Ibo culture becomes disenchanting, and as Bennett (2001: 67) points out, «disenchantment is a process integral to Christianity». It is not only upon dialogue that missionaries converted a lot of people. The Ibo people enforced the most powerful element in their religion to challenge and defeat Christianity. For instance, when the missionaries asked for a piece of land to build their church, they were offered the Evil Forest; «in it were buried all those who died of the really evil diseases, like leprosy and smallpox. It was also the dumping ground for the potent fetishes of great medicine men when they died» (Achebe, 1994:148). In this sense, the Evil Forest was a place that could enchant and petrify; it was «alive with sinister forces and powers of darkness» (Achebe, 1994: 148). The people of Mbanta were waiting for the Evil Forest to eradicate all the white people and their gods; however, when no one died, «it became known that the white man's fetish had unbelievable power» (Achebe, 1994: 149). After waiting for twenty-eight days, the result was the same, and by then the missionaries «won a handful more converts» (Achebe, 1994: 151). The Ibo culture begins to be disenchanting.

The confrontations between the Ibo religion and white people were not limited to religion, and «the white man had not only brought a religion but also a government» (Achebe, 1994: 155). It was not enough for the colonisers to convert people to Christianity. While «the novel depicts the Ibo society as a tribal community in which individuals are governed by a delicately intertwined system of traditions, customs, norms, and strict order» (Abd-Rabbo, 2019: 57), the coloniser's system fails to adhere to these customs and enforces the Western definition of civilisation and laws upon these people. The account of the sacred python invigorated the Ibo religion; «the royal python was the most revered animal in Mbanta and all the surrounding clans» (Achebe, 1994: 157),

and when the news spread that one of the newly converted members of the clan had intentionally murdered the sacred python, the entire clan was enraged. Later, however, before the people of the clan would do anything, the culprit «had fallen ill on the previous night. Before the day was over, he was dead» (Achebe, 1994: 161). The death of the culprit was inspiring news for the people of the clan and «his death showed that the gods were still able to fight their own battles» (Achebe, 1994: 161), and that they are still alive and powerful. In other words, they still had the power to enchant.

The next section of the novel is the return of Okonkwo to his fatherland after seven years of exile. Although Okonkwo believed that his clan has remained intact, upon returning to his clan, he realised that the infrastructure of his community has radically altered. Okonkwo is infuriated with the new order of things in his clan. He enquires about the transformation of his clan and his friend replies, «the white man is very clever.... we were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay... he has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart» (Achebe, 1994: 176). By the time Okonkwo returns, his clan is almost wholly disenchanted by Christianity and the powerful discourses of colonisers. The religious discussion between missionaries and the clan members still persists; the colonisers still suggest the lifelessness of Ibo's gods; «you carve a piece of wood... and you call it a god. But it is still a piece of wood» (Achebe, 1994: 179). Akunna, a member of the clan replies, «It is indeed a piece of wood. The tree which it came was made by Chukwu, as indeed all minor gods were» (Achebe, 1994: 179). Ibo's understanding of the world is enchanting since liveliness exists in matter in an interconnected web of objects. Conversely, however, Christian theology finds matter lifeless and disenchanted. On the other hand, modern technology that accompanied Christians and missionaries contributed to the battle of Ibo and Christian ontology. Unlike the Ibo tradition in which the power of magic and medicine was considered the same, the colonisers had introduced western medicine that «was quick in working» (Achebe, 1994: 181), and more efficient.

Okonkwo was confused by the power of the new religion and white people. His own son, Nwoye, converted to Christianity, and he became «a symbolic negation for his father, the living denial of all that Okonkwo accepts and stands for» (Innes & Lindfors, 1978: 13). The clan which was

once his fatherland had «undergone such profound change during his exile that it was barely recognisable» (Achebe, 1994: 182). The last and the most intense encounter between the Ibo people and the colonisers was when one of the newly converted Christians, Enoch murdered an ancestral spirit by unmasking «an *egwugwu* in public» (Achebe, 1994: 186). The clan found this sordid deed intolerable and sought revenge by burning down the church. They were, consequently, imprisoned, and humiliated. Okonkwo was one of the prisoners whose head was shaved and was beaten and whipped. After offering ransom to the white government, they agreed to let go of the members of the clan. The clan found this abomination intolerable hence, they ordered a meeting. During the meeting, some white messengers approached the members of the clan and ordered them to stop the meeting. «In a flash Okonkwo drew his machete. The messenger crouched to avoid the blow, it was useless» (Achebe, 1994: 204), and the messenger fell to the ground and died immediately. To Okonkwo's surprise, his clan did not support his action and they let go of the rest of the messengers. Okonkwo eventually left the meeting and in the last chapter, we were informed that he had committed suicide. He hanged himself and his people did not even bury him since as Obierika, Okonkwo's closest friend explained, «it is an abomination for a man to take his own life. It is an offence against the Earth, and a man who commits it will not be buried by his clansmen. His body is evil» (Achebe, 1994: 207). In a moment of despair, Obierika tells the District Commissioner, «that man was one of the greatest men in Umuofia. You drove him to kill himself, and now he will be buried like a dog» (Achebe, 1994: 208). The death of Okonkwo was an unjustifiable act in his clan and as stated above, it was a great abomination. The reason why he killed himself, I argue, was because he felt «the loss of contact with a meaningful moral universe» (Bennett, 2001: 8). I do not mean that Christianity is immoral or meaningless; however, what gave Okonkwo his social status and prestige was not Christianity. It was his *chi*, his harmonious relationship with his surroundings, and the presence of magic. Okonkwo, therefore, is an epitome of a disenchanted person whose beliefs and knowledge were undermined and forcibly replaced by a new worldview which was in stark contrast to his beliefs.

5. CONCLUSION

Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* represents two opposing worldviews. In the first part of the novel, I illuminated how the life of the Ibo people was enchanted due to the harmonious relationship of the people with their surroundings. The presence of magic, the incalculability and the vastness of knowledge, the feelings of wonder, fear, and amusement, and the liveliness of matter were all elements that contributed to the enchantment of the Ibo culture. On the contrary, the emergence of Christianity and the domination of the English colonisers through force, religion, government, Western knowledge, and medicine overthrew the stability of Ibo culture and each of these elements took an active part in winning the local people over. The establishment of this ideology created a void of meaning for the Ibo people. Okonkwo, a highly revered member of the clan committed suicide since he encountered an existential crisis. What used to give his life meaning and his society, order, was now simply replaced by the white people's religion. The defeat of Ibo's gods in a battle against Christianity and Western civilisation brought Okonkwo into despair. Committing suicide was a highly abominable act in Ibo tradition and the fact that Okonkwo committed suicide signifies his shaken faith in his own religion and tradition.

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