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MOULOU D MAMMERI UNIVERSITY OF TIZI-OUZOU
FACULTY OF LETTERS & LANGUAGES
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH



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كلية الآداب واللغات
قسم الإنجليزية

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***Suicide in Achebe's Things fall apart: a multidisciplinary
reading***

Presented by :
CHOUICHA Abderraouf
BENDIF Thiziri

Supervised by:
Pr. RICHE Bouteldja

Board of Examiners :

Mrs. LARABI Sabiha, MCA Mouloud Mammeri University of Tizi Ouzou, Chair;
Mr. RICHE Bouteldja, Prof Mouloud Mammeri University of Tizi Ouzou, supervisor;
Mr. CHERIFI Ahcene, MCB Mouloud Mammeri University of Tizi Ouzou, Examiner;

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**We dedicate this work to our families, freinds, and all the people
who believed in us.**

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Abstract

This research has explored the theme of suicide in Achebe's *Things fall apart*, focusing on the sociological, existential, psychoanalytic, anthropological, and postcolonial dimensions through which we have interpreted the protagonist Okonkwo's final act. The topic investigated how suicide has been portrayed not simply as a personal choice, but as a reflection of the larger cultural, psychological, and historical crisis. The methodology has combined several theoretical frameworks, including Durkheim's sociological theory of suicide, Camus's existential philosophy of the absurd, Macquarrie's existentialist interpretation of identity, guilt, and alienation, Ashcroft et al's literary theory of appropriation and abrogation accompanied with Lévi-Strauss's structural analysis of the Oedipal myth and the crisis of communication that aligned with Okonkwo's major problem, and Wright's psychoanalytic theory and concept of the return of the repressed. These approaches have been applied to Achebe's novel and supported by a comparative interpretation to the suicides of Ajax and Oedipus from the classical tragedy. The results have shown that Okonkwo's suicide aligned with multiple types of suicide introduced by Durkheim: altruistic, egoistic, anomic, fatalistic. The findings revealed that Okonkwo's death has represented a complex outcome of identity loss, cultural change, and resistance to colonial transformation. The research has concluded that his suicide served both as a personal tragedy and a symbolic reflection of the broader collapse of the Igbo society under the colonizer's oppression.

Keywords: anthropological, appropriation and abrogation, crisis of communication, suicide, tragedy

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Introduction

Suicide has been a serious global crisis that continued to claim millions of lives each year. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2025), more than seven thousand people have died by suicide, and seventy-three per cent of global suicides occurred in low and middle income countries, making it a pressing public health and social issue. Suicide has not been just an individual act but a complex phenomenon influenced by philosophical, psychological, sociological, and cultural factors. Throughout history, many philosophers, thinkers, and literary figures have examined the causes and consequences of suicide. The issue has raised fundamental questions about human suffering, meaninglessness, alienation, and societal pressures, making it an important subject of philosophical, sociological, and literary analysis.

Issue in context

Suicide is an act of intentionally causing one's own death, and a complex issue influenced by social, cultural, and psychological factors. It is associated with traumatic experiences that lead to mental health issues that make the individual unreasonable in his or her way of thinking and processing the environment around them. This act of self-destruction has been a fundamental problem for many philosophers, sociologists, and psychologists to analyze and discuss.

From a philosophical perspective, Camus has argued that suicide is a response to the absurdity of life, stating that "Vivre, c'est faire vivre l'absurde. Le faire vivre, c'est avant tout le regarder" (Camus, 1942, p. 78). For Camus, life is inherently absurd and devoid of meaning, and suicide represents surrendering to this absurdity rather than resisting it. He has suggested that people must confront existential despair and rebel against meaninglessness instead of succumbing to it. This perspective frames suicide as a philosophical dilemma, in which an individual must decide whether to continue living despite the lack of purpose.

Voinov, A. A. (2021), in his article has claimed that Plato has made his position on suicide clear through the character of Socrates. He has believed that no one should take their own life, under any circumstance. However, he has acknowledged that some individuals have felt a desire to die. Socrates has explained that taking one's own life without divine approval is impious, which means it goes against the will of the gods. According to Plato, people must wait for a "benefactor" someone or something greater than themselves to bring about their death. This has shown that he has not supported direct suicide, but he has made room for what can be called "assisted suicide", where death comes through another's intervention. Socrates has accepted death not out of despair, but because he has believed it was guided by a higher moral purpose (pp. 184- 87).

Psychologically speaking, Sigmund Freud has provided a psychological perspective on the causes of suicide and has argued that it is not solely influenced by social factors or religious beliefs but has also linked to an individual's mental state. While humans naturally seek to prolong their lives, some individuals develop a desire for self-destruction. According to Freud, one of humanity's biological instincts has been the urge to eliminate an opponent. In cases of suicide, a person voluntarily takes their own life, symbolically acting as both the aggressor and the victim. By ending their own existence, they aim to destroy the representation of others within themselves. Freud has attributed suicide to factors such as childhood psychological impairments and excessive stress. Later, he has expanded on this idea by offering a philosophical explanation, suggesting that human behavior has been driven by two fundamental instincts. The first is Eros, or the life instinct, which promotes survival and growth. The second is Thanatos, or the death instinct, which drives individuals toward destruction. These two forces have coexisted and have influenced one another, but when the death instinct has overpowered the survival instinct, individuals have become inclined to take their own lives. (Houssain, S., & Sakar., S. K2022).

Masango, S.M., Rataemane, S.T., and Motojesi, A.A. (2008), in their article have discussed suicide as a serious and growing health problem around the world. They have defined suicide as an

intentional act of ending one's own life and have stressed that it has often resulted from a mix of mental illness, emotional stress, and social isolation. Their findings have indicated that most people who have died by suicide have suffered from depression or other psychiatric conditions. In addition, they have found that men have been more likely to die by suicide, while women have tended to attempt it more often. The authors have also explained that losing a job, getting divorced, or feeling hopeless has increased suicide risk. From a medical point of view, they have noted that low levels of certain brain chemicals, like serotonin, have been linked to suicidal thoughts and behavior. Because of this, the authors have recommended that health workers assess people carefully and look for warning signs such as past attempts or hopeless thinking. They have concluded that while not every suicide has been preventable, early support and proper care have made a real difference (Masango, S.M. et al,2008 ,pp.25-8).

From a sociological standpoint, suicide has been often linked to social alienation, the breakdown from social norms, and the loss of identity. Durkheim, one of the pioneers of sociology, has categorized suicide in his book *Suicide: a study in sociology (1897-1999)* into four types: egoistic, altruistic, anomic, and fatalistic. His work has revealed that suicide is not merely an individual act but a reflection of larger social forces. Individuals who have felt disconnected from their communities, have experienced economic or cultural instability, or have faced overwhelming personal struggles are more likely to consider suicide. In this sense, social norms, cultural changes, and colonial influences have created a sense of purposelessness and meaninglessness, contributing to the psychological distress that has led to self-harm.

Last but not least, literature and drama have provided many varied cases of suicide. One of the notable novels that has dealt with suicide is Achebe's *Things fall apart*; Achebe's hero has become the subject of extensive scholarly debate and has attracted the attention of a wide range of critics.

Fraser's (1980) has gone in depth into the motivations behind the protagonist's self-inflicted death. Fraser in Achebe's *Things fall apart* has observed that critics have offered varied interpretations of Okonkwo's suicide. He has challenged the notion that Okonkwo's suicide was an honorable act to preserve his integrity and has put emphasis on the Igbo society's view on suicide, considering it shameful leading the deceased to be buried in the evil forest. Since suicide has been seen as shameful, Okonkwo has faced the same dishonorable fate as his father, something he has always despised. He has found himself trapped between his strong beliefs and the rapidly changing traditions of his people. As a result, he has become a victim of both colonial rule and his own struggles. Fraser has shown how the conflict between personal choices and outside forces has led to tragic consequences.

Freisen's article (2006), has challenged the conventional interpretation of Okonkwo's suicide in Achebe's *Things fall apart* as a tragic end resulting from personal failure and cultural disintegration. Instead, the article has claimed that Okonkwo's final act has been an intentional and affirmative resistance against colonial rigidity and the deterioration of the Igbo traditional values. Freisen has argued that Okonkwo's final act has been a powerful statement that aimed at preserving cultural identity and inspiring his community to resist against the colonizers. Freisen's point of view has reinterpreted Okonkwo's case not as a passive victim of fate, but an active member of society making a conscious decision to uphold his people's values in the face of the external forces. Freisen has highlighted the complexity of the character Okonkwo as the symbol of resistance and preservation of values in Achebe's novel.

The above literature review has shown that suicide as a social fact has received the attention of all types of scholars across disciplines, anthropologists, sociologists, and philosophers. It is not surprising that novelists and poets have also been interested in why people commit suicide. Achebe's novel has provided a typically illustrated case. The critics referred to in our review have shed light on suicide in Achebe's *Things fall apart*. However, their analyses have remained rather sketchy. The

longest and lengthiest article to deal with suicide is a note. The purpose of this research is to investigate this issue much more extensively than previous researches. In probing into this issue, we shall answer the following questions. The critics have focused on suicide in Achebe's *Things fall apart*, but is Okonkwo's case the only case of suicide in the novel? Why does Achebe end his novel with suicide? Are there any other cases in African and world literature which end similarly? What types of suicide are there? Does the novel develop one of them or the emphasis fall on them all? How does Okonkwo's suicide serve as both a personal tragedy and a metaphor for the collapse of Igbo community? To what extent is Okonkwo's suicide an act of resistance versus an act of surrender? What social factor contributed to Okonkwo's decision to take his own life? In what way does Okonkwo's personality and upbringing have influenced his final decision? How does Okonkwo's perception of masculinity influence his decision to take his own life?

Methodology

To answer the above questions, we shall develop critical categories borrowed from Durkheim's theory of suicide. The rapid industrialization and urbanization of the late 19th and early 20th centuries have brought about significant societal transformations, fundamentally reshaping how people lived and interacted. Industries have expanded and cities have grown at an unprecedented pace; millions have left rural areas in search of economic opportunities, settling in increasingly crowded urban environments. However, this shift has not been only economic or geographical it has profound social and psychological consequences. Traditional community structures, which had long provided individuals with a sense of belonging and stability has begun to disrupt. As people have left their small communities in the countryside they have often felt lonely in the busy and unfamiliar city life.

One of the most worrying effects of these social changes has been the increase in suicide rates. Suicide has referred to the intentional act of ending one's own life, often occurring when

individuals have felt covered by despair. Globally, around 700,000 people have taken their own lives each year through various means. In Africa alone, the suicide rate has reached approximately 11 per 100,000 people (WHO,2025). This growing crisis has worsened because people have been alienated from old values and helpful groups, leaving many individuals unprotected as they have struggled to find meaning and connection in a changing society that put money and growth before the community's well-being. Within this context, the French sociologist Durkheim has been deeply influenced by both the societal transformations around him and personal experiences such as the tragic loss of a childhood friend to suicide has embarked on a groundbreaking study. His goal has been to bring the light to underlying social causes of suicide, challenging the common belief that it has been solely individual psychological issue.

Durkheim's research ended in his seminal work *Le suicide (1897/1999)*. He has been influenced by external factors such as changes in societal norms, levels of social integration, and the degree of regulation imposed by society. Through the analysis of statistical data from various European countries, he has identified different types of suicide, each linked to specific social conditions. His study has laid the foundation for modern sociology, illustrating how broader social forces shape individual behavior. The four types of suicide he identified are: Altruistic, Egoistic, Anomic, and Fatalistic.

Altruistic suicide is a concept developed by Durkheim in *Le suicide (1999)*. It occurs when an individual takes their own life due to excessive integration into a group or society. This happens when the individual's sense of self is so strongly tied to collective values that personal identity is overshadowed by duty to the group. Examples have included soldiers sacrificing themselves in war or members of religious or cult-like groups committing suicide for the collective good. Durkheim provided a solid example on altruistic traits in his book, he noted that “ Les Japonais s'ouvrent le ventre pour la raison la plus insignifiante. On rapporte même qu'il s'y pratique une sorte de duel

étrange ou les adversaires luttent, non d'habilité à s'ouvrir le ventre de leurs propres mains” (Durkheim, p.239).

Another important type of suicide has been Egoistic suicide. It has occurred when individuals have felt isolated and disconnected from society. In modern times, many suicide cases have resulted from weak social bonds. When people have not felt a strong connection to their families, friends, or communities, they have struggled with loneliness and a lack of purpose. Durkheim has explained that “ Le suicide varie en raison inverse du degré d'intégration des groupes sociaux dont fait partie l'individu (Durkheim, p. 223). Egoism has been the opposite of altruism. While altruism has involved prioritizing the needs of others, egoism has occurred when individuals have been overly focused on themselves and have lacked meaningful relationships. In societies that have emphasized individualism and independence over communal support, the risk of egoistic suicide has increased.

When social bonds have weakened, communication between people has decreased, leaving individuals with fewer emotional and social outlets. Over time, persistent loneliness has led to feelings of hopelessness and emptiness, ultimately have resulted in suicide. Durkheim has believed that “ Nous ne pouvons donc tenir aux uns que dans la mesure où nous tenons à l'autre, c'est à dire à la société. Au contraire, plus nous nous sentons détachés de cette dernière, plus aussi nous détachons de cette vie – dont elle est à la fois la source et le but (Durkheim, p.227).

In contemporary societies, urbanization, digital communication replacing face-to-face interactions, and the pressure to be self-reliant have contributed to increased feelings of isolation. Unlike in the past, when communities have been more closely connected, today many people have prioritized living alone or work over meaningful social interactions. Durkheim's theory has suggested that “Pour toutes ces raisons, on ne peut mesurer avec quelque exactitude la densité relative des groupes familiaux que si l'on sait quelle n'est la composition effective”(Durkheim, P. 209).

Moreover, Anomic suicide has occurred when individuals have experienced instability and uncertainty due to a lack of clear social norms and regulations. Unlike other types of suicide, which have been closely tied to social relationships, anomic suicide has resulted from a breakdown of societal structures that have guided behavior and expectations; while biological needs such as hunger and thirst have had natural limits, social desires have lacked such boundaries, making individuals more vulnerable during times of social upheaval. Durkheim has argued that “Mais puisqu’il n’y a rien dans l’individu qui puisse leur fixer une limite, celle-ci doit nécessairement leur venir de quelque force extérieure à l’individu ” (Durkheim, p. 275). These regulations weaken or disappear, people may feel lost and perpetually dissatisfied, leading to frustration, anxiety, and hopelessness.

Anomic suicide has been particularly common during times of major social change, such as economic crises, political revolutions, or personal upheavals like job loss or sudden financial downfall. In such situations, individuals have felt that their previous goals and expectations no longer make sense, which has led to emotional distress and disorientation. Durkheim has emphasized that “Pour qu’il en soit autrement, il faut donc avant tout que les passions soient limitées” (Durkheim, p. 275), when these norms break down, people may feel disconnected and uncertain about their purpose, increasing the risk of suicide. Finally, Fatalistic suicide has occurred when individuals have felt excessively controlled by rigid societal rules and regulations, leaving them with no sense of personal freedom. In such cases, individuals have believed they have had no control over their lives, as strict traditions, customs, or oppressive laws have dictated their every action. This overwhelming sense of powerlessness has led to despair, making suicide appear as the only escape.

Individuals living under repressive governments or in strictly controlled environments have been more susceptible to fatalistic suicide. For example, in countries with oppressive governments, such as North Korea, citizens have had little to no agency over their lives, which has led to extreme feelings of hopelessness. The constant pressure to obey without question has resulted in deep

despair, and some individuals have taken their own lives in a desperate attempt to escape their reality.

The four types that have been mentioned above have been analyzed and combined by the well-known sociologist Durkheim. The typology of suicide must be examined and connected to the various characters and important events found in Achebe's *Things fall apart*. Through this comparison, we will be able to see how Durkheim's ideas relate to the struggles, traditions, and changes that took place within the society, as well as how the character's action reflect the different social concepts he has described.

Our methodology shall take its bearings from a philosophical perspective. The existential crisis of Okonkwo, Oedipus, and Ajax have been explored through the lens of Macquarrie's *Existentialism (1986)*. His book has illustrated the major ideas of existentialism and has examined how they related to the human life. He has explored the major themes of *Dasein*(Being there), the idea of no self without the world, freedom and responsibility that comes with anxiety and uncertainty, alienation and guilt, and death borrowed from Heidegger's perspective. These themes have aligned to help us deeply understand the tragic heroes' existential dilemmas that has resulted from their disconnection from their worlds and the collapse of the world that gave them their identity leading to their fatal destiny.

Camus's in *The myth of Sisyphus (1942)* developed his theory on suicide. It is one of the most important philosophical essays in existentialism. Camus has explored the human struggle for meaning and purpose in a life that has appeared indifferent. The existential dimension is strongly found in Achebe's *Things fall apart*. Camus has defined the absurd as the conflict between the human's crave for meaning and the universe's silence. People naturally are in a constant struggle for seeking purpose, yet the world offers nothing. He has used The Greek myth of Sisyphus as a metaphor for human existence.

Postcolonial literature has been an important response to the political and cultural downgrading that resulted from colonialism. In the colonial period, European narratives have portrayed the African societies as primitive, waiting to be saved by European civilization. African cultures have been considered as unable to create serious literature, complex political systems, or meaningful human experiences. African societies breakdowns, Therefore, have been interpreted by colonial writers not as tragedies, but as necessary failures. For Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin in *The empire writes back (2002)*, Postcolonial literature has struggled hard with “the enduring reality of colonial power” (Ashcroft et al, p. 195), and has attempted to reconstruct the cultural identity of the colonized. Postcolonial writers have attempted to bring back to light the richness of indigenous cultures of the world. Literature has become the field where the psychological, cultural, and historical hurts inflicted due to colonization have been addressed. Achebe’s *Things fall apart*, in this aspect, has been written to correct the distorted image of African societies presented in colonial literature. Achebe has portrayed precolonial Igbo society as dynamic, elaborate, and governed by its social and moral orders. His depiction of Okonkwo ‘s ascension and descent has shown that African civilizations have given birth to their own tragedies, worth being understood and respected. Focusing on the internal dynamics of Igbo life and external forces brought about by imperialism, Achebe has shown that African cultures are rich with history, ancestral traditions, and their own social authorities.

European colonial narratives have often gotten the nature of African societies incorrect and misinterpreted. African customs, traditions, and political structures have been mocked as being primitive, and African resistance to being colonized has often been seen as preposterous or comical. Africans have been considered unable to be seriously entangled in emotional conflict, great ethical thought, or high minded political thinking. These misconceptions have legitimized colonial rule by presenting Africans as incapable of self-governance. Achebe has strongly rejected this colonial imagination emphatically. In *Things fall Apart*, he illustrated the Igbo society as a community that

has a firm system of ruling, based on communal decision-making, religious faith, and social pacts. The village assembly has been portrayed as a forum where free men debate critical issues, showing a clear structure of democracy and justice. Religious life, centered around the worship of ancestors and the Earth goddess, has provided a moral compact for the community. Okonkwo's story has also subverted colonial stereotypes. Instead of depicting him as a foolish or simple character, Achebe has created Okonkwo as a multifaceted figure whose tragedy is a result of his own faults and the immense transformation in his society.

Okonkwo's fall has not been depicted as comic but as a profoundly moving human experience. Achebe thus, demonstrated that African societies have had their own internal wars, moral dilemmas, and especially tragic characters, just as comparable to those of Europe. Achebe has achieved his unique piece of literature through adapting the post-colonial literary theory of appropriation and abrogation, where he appropriated tragedy and abrogated comedy. The major tragic element of Achebe's tragic hero has been his lack of communication within his tribe and even his own family. Therefore, we have taken our critical bearings from Lévi-Strauss's *Anthropologie structurale deux* (1996), His anthropological interpretation of the tragedy of Oedipus has perfectly aligned with Okonkwo's problem of communication. However, Achebe does not follow the traditional classical tragedy, but he twisted the story of Okonkwo's tragedy in order to fit the African way of life and their tragic suffering from the colonial disruption.

Besides the sociological, existential, and postcolonial perspectives, this research has adopted a psychoanalytical theory drawn from Wright's book *Psychoanalytic criticism: theory in practice* (1984). Wright has argued that literary texts have often revealed unconscious conflicts, repressed desires, and psychological breakdowns through the behavior and speech of characters. She has emphasized that characters can be seen as a subject shaped by internal struggles, or emotional rigidity have indicated deeper forms of repression. According to her, identity has been constructed through symbolic systems like language, and when those systems have failed, the subject has

experienced a collapse of meaning and self. This theory has been especially useful in interpreting Okonkwo's emotional control, violent actions as signs of inner conflicts, and Oedipus's breakdown as a confrontation with repressed truth. Wright's framework has made it possible to understand both character's tragic ends as a psychological as well as cultural and symbolic crises.

Fanon in his book *The wretched of the earth (1968)*, postcolonial theory has been a critical framework that has examined the psychological and cultural effects of colonialism and the process of decolonization. Fanon has argued that colonization reshapes the culture and the psychological identity of a colony, which has aligned with the case of Achebe's *Things fall apart*. This psychological control has caused trauma that led to Okonkwo's act of violence, first, against the colonizers messenger, and then turned it against him. Fanon has confirmed that colonizers have destroyed the colonized subjects through the implantation of violence in them. The colonization process has left Okonkwo trapped between his values that have entirely shaped him and the colonizer's values; this has led to his alienation and struggle for belonging. This has mirrored Okonkwo's existential crisis.

Results and discussion

Results

In deepening the methodology debated above, we have obtained the following results. Okonkwo has committed suicide because his whole life has been shaped by his societal and cultural values. He has been committed to his village's social norms, and ready to fight for the survival of his own culture, and sacrifice himself for the tribe. This act of selflessness has been analysed through Durkheim's sociological concept of altruism, which is the excessive integration of an individual in a social group. As Okonkwo's life has been tied to the Igbo values, which happened to be his first prioritized concern. This has appeared in the sacrifice of his son Ikemefuna, as Okonkwo has taken the action of executing him against his will. His suicide has been resourced from his strong

adherence to his traditions, and the fact that prioritizing his village's interests came at the expense of his own life.

Egoistic suicide in Durkheim's theory has provided a strong perspective on Okonkwo's life. As we have mentioned in our dissertation, that his life has been shaped by his traditions and culture. Because colonialism has destroyed the cultural and traditional beliefs of the Igbo tribe, Okonkwo has been left alienated, disintegrated, and has no longer shared the same tribal values with his own society. The weakened societal values have created a space where people like Okonkwo have no significance. this has led to his death by suicide.

Anomic suicide has been a significant perspective in which we shall interpret Okonkwo's suicide. This type of suicide has occurred when social limits, regulations, and restrictions have suddenly erased from the society. Okonkwo's case has been the perfect example for this concept. The arrival of colonialism has impacted the Igbo's authority and restrictions. His society has provided him clear limits and social rules and values. However, colonialism has led these social regulations to their downfall. Okonkwo's attempts to resist against this change have failed due to the lack of social limits and restrictions that once supported and shaped him. His suicide has resulted from the lack of social rules, where he found himself living in an environment where his social rules have no longer been respected.

The concept of fatalistic suicide has highlighted another perspective on Okonkwo's final act. He has been a strong and ambitious man who had goals in his life. However, the colonial rule has imposed restrictions and rules on the Igbo society and changed the social structure of his village. Okonkwo's limitless ambitions and goals have been crushed under the weight of the colonial forces. The changed society has become a place where heroic figures like Okonkwo cannot find themselves thriving in. He found himself in a society where he can no longer bear the new social rules and limits. the new environmental and social changes have pushed him to kill himself

Achebe's *Things fall apart* has been analysed through the philosophical dimension of existentialism. Through which the character Okonkwo has had a similar tragic ends with the Greek supposed heroes Ajax and Oedipus. Okonkwo's existential crisis raised from the collapse of his world that once defined his life. He found himself trapped in a world he cannot recognize. With no identity, he has found himself alienated from his world which led ultimately to his tragic death. This has been the same for Oedipus, when the truth has been revealed in front of him, he has realized that his identity has been built on lies, which led him to his self-destructive act of blinding himself which is a strong indicator of his feeling of guilt and alienation. Both character's final acts have been reactions to refute worlds where they no longer fit in.

Similarly, Ajax and Okonkwo have also struggled with shame, identity, and alienation. Through colonialism, Okonkwo's respect and status have been erased leading him to be face to face with his fear of weakness. This has led to his disconnection with his world, a world that has been manipulated and finally destroyed by colonialism, which drove him to kill himself. Ajax has confronted the same crisis. He has been ashamed of his madness, and lost his heroic position among his fellows. This has also alienated him from his people, and drove him to kill himself. Okonkwo's and Ajax's burials have revealed their existential estrangement from their own environments. The refusal of burying Okonkwo because of his suicide, and throwing his corps in the evil forest, and Ajax's burial in a suicide coffin have been a powerful indicator of their complete loss of honour, dignity, and respect among their people. Their burial rituals have shown how much these characters have been completely disintegrated and thrown away from their own worlds.

Achebe's central character has also been explored through the existential perspective of absurdism introduced by Camus. Okonkwo's life has been shaped by his adherence to his traditional values. His entire identity and status have been built on his commitment to his tribe's high standards. However, Okonkwo's fulfilled life has taken a tragic turn after the arrival of the colonizers. His status, and all what he worked so hard for has vanished quickly. He has not been able to rebuild his

life again with meaning and purpose because of his state of alienation and isolation. His life became purposeless and meaningless. This has led Okonkwo to a state of existential rebellion which has referred to his refusal and rejection of the absurdity of his existence. This state of being has pushed Okonkwo to rebel on his own against the colonizers through killing the messenger. Unlike Sisyphus who accepted his absurd fate, Okonkwo has rejected his situation and rebelled against the colonizer on his own, but nothing has changed which has deepened his existential wound, and finally this drove him to end his own life.

Achebe's *Things fall apart* has been one of the most significant literary works that has portrayed tragedy in the African literature. Achebe has relied on the two main strategies of appropriation and abrogation as a tool to show that African cultures are not primitives but rather culture rich with traditions, customs, and human intelligence. To do so, Achebe has abrogated the comedy. The Western literature has often described African cultures as lacking reason and intelligence, and African heroes as primitive retarded human beings which has been the funniest part for Europeans. Achebe has portrayed the Igbo society as a complex and intelligent society; the Igbo society has its own rituals, customs, and its own system of justice and authority. Language has played a significant role in the abrogation of colonial comic interpretation of African cultures. Achebe has filled his novel with the Igbo proverbs and terms refusing to translate them to leave the opportunity for the western reader to investigate and go deeper into the Igbo culture in order to understand them.

Achebe's appropriation of tragedy has been a brilliant and unique technique to express and expose the colonizer's oppression and the African suffering. He has appropriated the classical tragedy and reshaped it to fit the African standards of the tragic hero. Achebe has not described just the downfall of an individual, but through his tragic hero Okonkwo, his suicide has a symbolic portrayal to the whole Igbo community. their loss of morals, values and communication has led to their end. From an anthropological perspective, myths have been built on enigmas and

miscommunication. The tragedy of Oedipus has been built on his ignorance and solving the riddle of the sphinx only to discover the harsh truth about his inevitable fate. He did not know about that truth until it happened. Even though the signs have been clear, but due to his miscommunication, his ignorance has led to his fall. However, in Achebe's *Things fall apart*, Okonkwo has been aware of the truth and what has been happening around him, but he could no longer act on his terms but rather lost communication with his own people and even his family, and finally this has led him to kill himself because nobody around him has understood him. The tragic element of the disruption of communication has also illustrated the bigger miscommunication between the Igbo people which led to the collapse of their tribe, values, and identity. Achebe's twist of tragedy has been built on the awareness of the truth and the dislocation of the basis of the Igbo society. He used his tragic hero Okonkwo to show the bigger issue of the African societies.

The psychological interpretation of both Okonkwo's and Oedipus's suicides is crucial for further and much deeper understanding of the main psychological reasons of their destructive acts. Through Wright's psychoanalytic framework, their downfalls have steamed from unresolved psychological conflicts through their repression and denial. According to Wright, their acts of blinding and suicide are not simply responses to external defeat but an expression of their internal collapse. Their identities, constructed around the ideals of control and strength have been shattered when repressed truths have surfaced. The return to the repressed, as Wright has described, exposed the fragility and the weakness of the self when it is built on avoidance of the unconscious realities. Oedipus has been undone by the revelation of his own actions, which contradicted everything he has believed about himself, while Okonkwo have been broken under the weight of changing world that threatened the rigid values he has internalized.

Through Fanon's theory of violence, we have uncovered that colonialism has caused severe psychological and social effects; one of the major effect of colonialism is violence. The colonizers have used violence and oppression to dismantle the Igbo social structures. This violence has been

transferred and planted in the Igbo people. In Achebe's *Things fall apart*, Okonkwo has been a symbol of pride, resistance, and a very committed man to his society's values, and traditions. However, the arrival of colonialism has entirely destroyed the Igbo's culture. Okonkwo found himself alone and desperate to resist while his people, including his own son have quickly converted to the new tradition, religion, and laws. This has been one of the violent processes colonizers apply to weaken the colonized people's belief in tradition, but Okonkwo has stood against this transformation. This has driven Okonkwo to his final desperate act of violence against colonialism as a form of resistance, but no one has supported him which has pushed his violence to intensify. This suppressed violence and rage have resulted from watching his tribe take the way to their own destruction. The internalized traumatic experience of Okonkwo has led to the mental disorders that colonial violence has created in him, which has pushed him to destroy himself.

Discussion

The sociological dimension of suicide

First of all, in order to analyse the issue of suicide in Achebe's *Things fall apart*, we shall first understand Okonkwo's cultural, societal, and environmental background that has shaped his identity, as it has provided insights into the significance of his final act; afterward, we shall deconstruct his character through the lens of Durkheim's four types of suicide. Okonkwo is a product of the Igbo society, which has been shaped by the values of masculinity, honour, and social status. His entire life has been built on the fear of failure and weakness. This has been influenced by his hatred for his father Unoka "When Unoka died he had taken no title at all and he was heavily in debts. Any wonder then that his son Okonkwo was ashamed him? (Achebe, 2001, p.6). However, the arrival of the British colonizer and the introduction of Christianity has shaken the traditional structure of the Igbo society. The authority of the elders and the Gods has been degraded and oppressed, and the values that has defined Okonkwo's universe have collapsed. This cultural gradual

change has left him powerless and alienated, while he has witnessed his people submitting to the order of the British authorities.

Altruistic suicide

Okonkwo's suicide can be interpreted as an altruistic act. He has been portrayed as an adherent to traditional Igbo values. In Achebe's *Things fall apart* "Okonkwo was well known throughout the nine villages and beyond. His fame rested on solid personal achievements. As a young man of eighteen had brought honour to his village by throwing Amalinze the Cat". (Achebe, p.3). Okonkwo's life has represented the collective Igbo cultural and societal values, as this has been his priority above every single aspect of his life. Even though he has loved Ikemefuna like a son, Okonkwo has killed him because he believed that not taking this action would ruin his reputation and would be perceived as weak. Durkheim noted that " Une prime sociale est ainsi attachée au suicide qui est par cela même encouragé, et le refus de cette récompense a, quoique a un moindre degré, les mêmes effets qu'un châtement proprement dit."(Durkheim, p.240) Okonkwo does not want to kill Ikemefuna, but he does it because refusing would bring him shame and appear weak in the eyes of the clan. Okonkwo's act of violence and his engagement in the clan's sacrificial rituals has been performed due to the social pressure rather than his personal choice to maintain his social respect and warrior identity through proving his strength even though he has been warned not to include himself in the execution. Durkheim in his book has argued that

Il existe parmi eux une espèce d'hommes sauvages et grossiers auxquels on donne le nom de sages. A leurs yeux, c'est une gloire de prévenir le jour de la mort, et ils se font brûler vivants dès que la longueur de l'âge ou la maladie commence à les tourmenter. La mort, quand on l'attend, est, selon eux, le déshonneur de la vie ; aussi ne rendent-ils aucun honneur au corps qu'a détruits la vieillesse. Le feu serait souillé s'il ne recevait l'homme respirant encore. (Durkheim, pp. 234-35)

The quote above has explored how in some traditional societies, individuals commit suicide not out of personal despair, but as a social obligation and duty. This concept has been directly related to Okonkwo's suicide in Achebe's *Things fall apart*, as his death has not been an act of despair but

rather a reflection of his strong commitment to Igbo traditions and values. Okonkwo has been illustrated as a man deeply tied and connected to his clan's customs, and has been driven by the need to preserve the ideals of strength, masculinity and honour. Much more like the individuals in the quote who believed in ending their lives on their own terms, Okonkwo has considered his suicide an escape or an exit to maintain his dignity. He has not been able to stand living under the British ruler's hands, which he has perceived as an attack on everything he has spent his entire life on protecting and worshipping. Just as the individuals in the quote have seen awaiting death as dishonourable, Okonkwo has considered submitting to the colonizers as an intolerable humiliation. The quote above has implied that in some societies, suicide is not a personal choice but a cultural expectation. This has been the perfect alignment with the implanted collective beliefs. Okonkwo's personality has been shaped by the rigid values of his people, and has considered resistance as the number one duty in order to protect what he has lived for. When he has realized that his fellow clansman have not chosen to fight alongside with him, he has taken his own life as an act of defiance, rejecting a world that downgraded and humiliated the values he had cherished. Okonkwo has not killed himself because he has lost his personal hope, but rather because he believed that this is the only way to not be exposed to submission, humiliation, and most importantly dishonour. This is how his death has mirrored the concept of an altruistic interpretation.

Egoistic suicide

Okonkwo's suicide can be discussed through another type of suicide that has been the opposite to altruism. Egoistic suicide has aligned with Okonkwo's self-destruction. Durkheim has argued that

Nous arrivons donc à ce premier résultat que le penchant du protestantisme pour le suicide doit être en rapport avec l'esprit de libre examen dont est animé cette religion. Attachons-nous à bien comprendre ce rapport. Le libre examen n'est lui-même que l'effet d'une autre cause. Quand il fait son apparition, quand les hommes, après avoir, pendant longtemps, reçu leur foi toute faite de la tradition, réclament le droit de se la faire eux-mêmes, ce n'est pas à cause des attrait intrinsèque de la libre recherche, car elle apporte avec elle autant de douleurs que de joies. Mais c'est qu'ils sont désormais

besoin de cette liberté. Or, ce besoin lui-même ne peut avoir qu'une seule cause : c'est l'ébranlement des croyances traditionnelles (Durkheim, p157).

Durkheim's argument about Protestantism, and as traditional beliefs has been weakened, individuals' struggle with self-determination that has led them to despair and then suicide. This approach has been directly applied on Achebe's tragic hero Okonkwo. Durkheim has discussed that when a person's beliefs have been entirely guided by tradition, he has been provided with a clear sense of meaning and purpose in life. Okonkwo's self-worth has been built on the traditional expectations of masculinity in the Igbo society. He has always aimed to represent the ideal strong, fearless, and successful man. Achebe's *Things fall apart* has described how Okonkwo has reached the top thanks to his physical power and work ethics "He was tall and huge, and his bushy eyebrows and wide nose gave him a very severe look...He had no patience with unsuccessful men. He had no patience with his father" (Achebe, p.3). Okonkwo has been known for his rigid adherence for his traditions, the foundations of his strong identity.

Durkheim has emphasized the individual's feelings of detachment from their social identity when the traditional values have lost their validity and authenticity. This has mirrored Okonkwo's sense of despair when the British colonialism and Christianity has destabilized and disrupted the Igbo customs. Therefore, most of the tribe's members have adapted to the new beliefs that have been introduced by the missionaries and have sworn their allegiance to the new order. Okonkwo, on the other hand, has refused to compromise believing that kneeling down and submitting to the colonizer's ideologies and system has been a sign of weakness. As Achebe writes "Now he has won our brothers, and our clan can no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart" (Achebe, p.129). This quote has reflected Okonkwo's frustration with the dismantle of the Igbo traditions by colonial influence. He has realized that the unity of his people gradually disintegrated under the influence of the colonial government. Okonkwo's alienation has been evident in his return from the exile from Mbanta for seven years after he accidentally has killed a clansman. Achebe noted that "He had been cast out of his clan like a fish onto a dry, sandy

beach, panting” (Achebe, p. 96). He could not allow himself to acquire and integrate in another identity outside of the traditional warrior. He has struggled with social integration, finding himself isolated in his absurd existence in the society that he has once appreciated and gave his life a purpose. This isolation has been an important characteristic of Durkheim’s egoistic suicide.

Durkheim has compared Protestant societies to Catholic societies. He has argued that Protestants are more prone to egoistic suicide, their faith, and how Protestantism has encouraged individual’s freedom of conscience over the group’s shared beliefs. This has led to a weaker sense of the shared beliefs and traditions. As Durkheim illustrates “Par conséquent, si le protestantisme fait à la pensée individuelle une plus grande part que le catholicisme, c’est qu’il compte moins de croyances et de pratiques communes” (Durkheim, p.158). In Achebe’s *Things fall apart*, Okonkwo’s belief in Igbo masculinity and tradition has isolated him from his changing society. Just as Protestantism has encouraged individualism at the expense of the collective unity, Okonkwo’s obsessive commitment to his personal values has alienated. When Umuofia has refused to rebel against the British colonizers, Okonkwo has realized that he no longer has shared the same beliefs and traditions leaving him with the feeling of betrayal. This loss of social ties has mirrored Durkheim’s idea that weakened values and societal bonds, have led Okonkwo to identity crisis ultimately pushed him towards suicide.

Anomic suicide

Okonkwo’s suicide shall be interpreted through an anomic approach in order to understand his motives to end his life. Durkheim has claimed that individuals alone cannot define limits to their desires or ambitions. Instead, society should provide external restrictions through norms, traditions, and religions that have shaped people’s behaviours, and without this external power, people have struggled to control their ambitions, as a consequence, frustration and instability. Durkheim on social limits noted “Mais puisqu’il n’y a rien dans l’individu qui puisse leur fixer une limite, celle-ci doit nécessairement leur venir de quelque force extérieure à l’individu”(Durkheim, p.275). Therefore,

this idea has aligned with Okonkwo anomie. He is a man who has been deeply shaped by the Igbo societal norms. He has thrived because the Igbo traditional society has provided clear values for him like masculinity, wealth, strength, status, and success. However, with the arrival of the British, these external forces have collapsed. Okonkwo's societal values have changed, replaced, and lost authority with the new values and social system, he has been unable to balance his desires and expectations. He has tried to resist the changes, but without a functioning system to validate him, he has been left in a state of anomie, lacking the external constraints he has needed to not lose his sense of direction.

Durkheim has also highlighted that societies have imposed limits on an individual's ambitions. Individuals have known what level of power and wealth has been realistic for them, so the society has prevented them from chasing unattainable goals through embedded limits in cultures and traditions. He writes "Il y a donc une véritable réglementation qui, pour n'avoir pas toujours une forme juridique, ne laisse pas de fixer, avec une précision relative, le maximum d'aisance que chaque classe de la société peut légitimement chercher à atteindre" (Durkheim, p 276). In Igbo society, Okonkwo has been familiar with the path of success and prosperity. He has worked hard and become a respected warrior with status and wealth. However, when the colonial rule has disrupted the traditional Igbo hierarchy, these limits have disappeared with the rise and the spread of Christianity that has left warriors like Okonkwo lose their aura and influence. Okonkwo who has been relying on his societal regulations to validate his success, has found himself in a world where the Igbo society became Christian. This state drove him to frustration and despair that played an important part that has led to his ultimate suicide.

"Sous cette pression, chacun, dans sa sphère, se rend vaguement compte du point extrême jusqu'où peuvent aller ses ambitions et n'aspire rien au-delà. Si, du moins, il est respectueux de la règle et docile à l'autorité collective, c'est-à-dire s'il n'est pas bien d'exiger davantage" (Durkheim, p.277). This quote has highlighted the idea that society has imposed limits on individual ambition. People generally have internalized these limits and accepted them as ensuring stability in their lives.

According to Durkheim, those who have had a sound moral constitution and have respected the collective authority have recognized these restrictions and no longer seek to exceed them. This regulation of desire has prevented individuals from experiencing constant dissatisfaction and going for unrealistic goals. However, when these societal rules have been weakened, individuals may have struggled to define their aspirations, this has led them do disorientation and frustration that is a condition that Durkheim has called anomie.

In Achebe's *Things fall apart*, Okonkwo has been the perfect example to the breakdown of societal regulations. In the pre-colonial Igbo society, Okonkwo has thrived because he has understood the rules of success that have been provided by his society. He has almost worshiped these social constraints and worked with them, believing that his efforts will bring him honour and recognition. His ambitions have been clear and his path to success has been defined. However, with the arrival of the British, this framework has collapsed. The traditional Igbo society has lost its power. Warriors have been no longer respected, and Christian converts have overtaken the position of influence and power. Suddenly, Okonkwo has found himself in a society where the limits he has once respected no longer apply. This loss of regulations has created a deep existential crisis for Okonkwo. He no longer has understood how far his ambitions can go, nor has seen a clear path towards regaining the status that he has lost. He has found himself trapped between his traditional values and the new order that has challenged everything he believes in. He has been unable to function in a world where societal rules have been erased and manipulated. His suicide has been a response to an environment without clear limits, a world where he has lost who he is. Through this, Okonkwo's fate has perfectly illustrated Durkheim's concept of anomie.

Fatalistic suicide

Finally, Durkheim has explored fatalistic suicide which is the opposite of anomie. Okonkwo's case shall be connected to this approach. Durkheim has explained the paradox of social influence. It has seemed distant, yet it has deeply shaped individuals. The social structure has been very dominant

that it has invaded personal lives. He asserted that “Pour qu’il reste identique à lui-même alors qu’ils changent, il faut que, en un sens, il soit indépendant d’eux ; et pourtant, il faut aussi qu’il y ait quelque voie par où il puisse s’insinuer en eux”(Durkheim, p.339). Okonkwo has internalized the rigid expectations of masculinity and honour. Even when the world has changed, he cannot adapt because those values have been inside him. He has seen suicide as the only way to uphold his dignity in a world that no longer honours it. Durkheim has emphasized that personal sadness alone rarely causes suicide. In order to turn this feeling into a fatal decision, it should take a strong external forces like oppression, and has explained that fatalistic suicide has occurred when control and despair are too strong to resist. He put forward the idea that “Une inclination aussi faible est tellement éloignée de l’acte qu’elle peut-être regardée comme nulle. Elle n’a pas une force suffisante pour pouvoir, à elle seule, déterminer un suicide”(Durkheim, p.341).

In Achebe’s *Things fall apart*, Okonkwo’s suicide has been the perfect example for Durkheim’s concept of fatalism. As the colonial administration has dismantled the traditional Igbo society, Okonkwo has found himself trapped in a world where his identity, values, and social role have been rendered meaningless. The collapse of his cultural framework, combined with the shame of no longer being able to assert his masculinity or resist the foreigner’s domination has created a strong sense of powerlessness. Like the individual Durkheim has described, whose inner despair has deepened by rigid and inescapable societal control, Okonkwo has picked the choice of death as the only way to escape a future he cannot accept. His suicide has been a final act shaped also by fatalistic forces, by a world that has closed all the paths in his direction.

The existential interpretation of suicide

Okonkwo’s suicide in Achebe’s *Things fall apart* shall be interpreted as an existential crisis that has resulted from the disintegration of his identity, loss of meaning, and alienation from his own culture, mirroring the tragic downfall of Oedipus and Ajax, who similarly have confronted a world

that no longer reflects their values or selves. The tragedies of Oedipus and Okonkwo have reflected a deep existential confrontation with identity, fate, and social dislocation. Both men have fallen from honour and power into despair, as their sense of self and control over their lives has fallen apart. Their crises have not been personal failures but represent a profound existential conflict between them in a disordered environment. According to Macquarie “Sartre who stresses the obstinate and opaque en-soi character of things make up the world, nearly summarizes the reciprocity between self and world in these words: ‘Without the world there is no selfhood, no person; without selfhood, without the person, there is no world’” (Macquarrie, 1986. p,81). This is a world where cultural norms have collapsed and identity torn apart. Oedipus, having unknowingly killed his father and married his mother has put him in a situation where he has committed a self-destructive act the moment he has realized that his identity has been built on an unspeakable truth. As Graves writes “Oedipus retorted that he acknowledged to better expect the gods and his own parents” (Graves, p.372). This declaration of pride, self-worth, and independence has been shattered by the oracle’s revelation and his response has been self-punishment “Oedipus blinded himself with. A pin taken from her garments” (Graves, p.374). His identity has been crushed through fate and truth. He has been a saviour king who solved the riddle of the sphinx ‘man’ he replied, ‘because he crawls. On all four as an infant... And leans upon a staff in his old age’ (Graves, p. 372). Oedipus the solver of the riddle has become the riddle himself, a man who cannot see the truth of his own life which is ironical.

These existential crises have mirrored Okonkwo’s collapse in Achebe’s *Things fall apart*. Okonkwo as well is a man who has built his identity on strength, masculinity, and traditions. However, the arrival of the colonial rule has destabilized these values. Macquarie has explained that there is no self without a world to exist in. Okonkwo has found himself alone. His own world and environment have completely faded away and replaced by another alternative that has destroyed completely his own world. He could not fit it or find himself in the other world leaving him with no

world. Therefore, his existence has been absurd. However, from a different existentialist perspective, he has written

Especially in the language of religion, the world has sometimes been regarded as a threat to a genuine humanity and the so called 'wordly' man is taken to be one who has 'fallen' from the normative human condition... But even in the context of genuinely biblical faith, the assertion of the goodness of the world as God's creation is accompanied by the warning that man can be lost in the world if it gains the mastery over him. (Macquarrie, p.82)

The assertion that "there is always a lack or disproportion between the self as projected and the self where it actually stands" (Macquarrie, p.203) has illustrated the existential break at the core of both characters that has filled them with alienation. Just like Oedipus considered himself as the rational savior king of Thebes, he could not escape the truth of his own tragic fate that has been bounded to him since birth. Okonkwo could not resist the culture change. He has returned from exile only to find his people submitted to the white colonizers and his role as a warrior became meaningless. As Achebe writes clearly "He knew because they had let the other messenger escape. They had broken into tumult instead of action" (Achebe, p.149). Okonkwo's projected self of strength, masculinity, and dominance has been met and crushed by the actual condition, just like Oedipus, who has been bounded with tragedy, yet he has ignored the truth until it crushed him. Macquarrie asserted that a "Man is so constituted that he stands in the possibility of falling, that is to say, of a disproportion or failure to measure up the stature of his possibility" (Macquarrie, p.203).

Both characters have been burdened by guilt and isolation. Oedipus has cursed his son's before leaving Thebes "but not before he had cursed Eteocles and Polyneices" (Graves, p.374). Similarly, Okonkwo has become estranged from his people and family. "He was one of the greatest men in Umofia, you drove him to kill himself" says Obierica to the district Commissionaire (Achebe, p.151). This act of suicide, like Oedipus's blinding, is a form of existential refusal, a final act in a world that no longer makes sense. Both men have confronted a universe where traditional sources of meaning, gods, honour, and tribal values have failed them. The gods have abandoned Oedipus after he knew the truth, and his role as a king became a symbol of a cursed leadership.

“Expel the murderer of Laius” (Graves, p.372) not knowing that it speaks of the very king Thebes celebrated. Likewise, Okonkwo has found no spiritual rescue in the ancestors of Umuofia. The Igbo traditions have been mocked and dismantled by the colonizers and his community has submitted. His final act has not been an act of cowardice, but an existential rebellion against a society no longer he recognizes.

Ajax, a Greek hero of the Trojan War and Okonkwo, the tragic hero of Achebe's *Things fall apart* have both suffered profoundly from an existential problem that led them to their hard decision to kill themselves. Their tragic ends come from not only from existential pressure, but also from internal struggles, identity loss, anxiety, alienation, and guilt and the downfall of the values that have shaped their lives. Their downfall has illustrated how their extreme commitment to pride, honour, and traditional values can be destructive in the times of cultural radical change and transition. Ajax's existential crisis begun when his claim to Achilles's arms has been denied, an act that has deeply wounded his pride and sense of identity as a hero. Graves noted that “It was Zeus himself who provoked the quarrel” (Graves, p.684). Ajax have found himself rooted in human pride and rage. Feeling dishonored, He has planned to kill the Greek leaders in revenge, but under Athene's influence, he has been driven into madness and slaughtered livestock instead, mistaking them for his enemies. As he writes “Ajax planned to revenge himself on his fellow-Greeks that very night; Athene, however, struck him with madness and turned him loose, however, has struck him with madness” (Graves, p. 684). When he has returned to his senses, shame and despair, and humiliation have consumed his soul. He has resolved to end his life. As he maintains “Then, with a word to Tecmessa that he would escape Athene's anger by bathing in a sea pool and finding some untrodden patch of ground where the sword might be securely buried, he set out, determined on death” (Graves, p.684). This dishonour of his madness and rejection have broken the foundation of his warrior identity, leaving him existentially alienated. As Macquarie has explained that “The gap is between existence and essence, or between facticity and possibility, or between the self one is and the self

that is projected” (Macquarie. p,203). This quote has reflected Ajax’s internal struggles, the self he truly is and later ashamed and frustrated and cannot live up to the heroic image he once has projected. This existential gap caused him deep alienation and guilt and finally taking his own life.

Similarly, Okonkwo’s crisis has emerged as colonial forces have dismantled the Igbo societal structure that once defined him. Like Ajax, Okonkwo has built his personality from scratch to an honourable and a well-respected feared figure of society. However, his status has been erased from the society due to colonialism and its imposed new laws on the tribe. He found himself powerless and weak which is something he has been fighting to avoid for his entire life. Achebe has notes that “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 years in which he might have taken the highest titles in the clan.” (Achebe, p.125). This has led to his alienation. The man he projected himself to be has been erased and the possibility of him becoming the hero that he has been fighting and struggling to reach impossible, this has aligned with Macquarrie’s idea of alienation. he has stated that “Man is so constituted that he stands in the possibility of falling, that is to say, of a disproportion or failure to measure up to the stature of his possibility” (Macquarrie, p.203). Okonkwo’s despair has grown when his community refused to resist against the colonizers. In a final act of desperation, he has killed a messenger, expecting his people to follow his lead. Achebe writes “He knew that Umofia would not go to war. He knew because they had let the other messenger escape.” (Achebe, p.149). Realizing he has been alone and felt betrayed, he took his own life. Both men have considered suicide as the only option to take control in a world where they have lost it, not only from their despair but, their suicide has emerged from a deeper existential crisis linked to failure

Ajax’s and Okonkwo’s death and burials have revealed a powerful resemblance in how suicide has affected traditional and cultural or religious beliefs, even if they have been honored warriors. Both have been abrogated from honour in death, but their communities have responded in different ways that have reflected their cultural values. After Ajax’s suicide, a heated debate among

the Greek commanders has taken place over whether he deserves an honourable burial. His suicide has been the result of madness and dishonor which has made some of his peers, like Agamemnon and Menelaus argue that he should be left unburied, a shameful fate in Greek culture. Graves writes “Menelaus strode up and forbade him to burry Ajax” (Graves, p.658), reflecting the shame that has been associated with his suicide.

This denial of proper and decent burial has revealed how deeply his act violated the heroic values. Eventually, only “Calchas’s advice allowed Ajax to be buried in a suicide’s coffin at Cape Rhoeteum, rather than burned on Pyre as if he had fallen honorably in battle” (Graves, p.685). This shifted from cremation to burial in a coffin has showed a loss of honour and deviation from traditional warrior rituals. These actions have illustrated how Ajax’s suicide not only has ended his life, but also has broken the heroic and societal values that once has defined his identity. However, Okonkwo has been denied to be buried by his own people after hanging himself, which is an act that has been forbidden in the Igbo beliefs. Achebe writes “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” (Achebe, p.152).

This act of abandonment and asking the white men to bury him has crushed Okonkwo’s dignity. Unlike Ajax, whose enemies have buried him, Okonkwo has been left alone and thrown in the evil forest. This action has been a strong indicator of the downfall and the disruption of the Igbo values that he has once dedicated his entire life to worship, preserve, and protect. As Obierika has said “That man was one of the greatest men in Umofia. You drove him to kill himself and now he will be buried like a dog...” (Achebe, p.152). Both deaths have shown how suicide has challenged communal values, but in the end, Ajax has not been ultimately honoured through heroic rituals, Okonkwo has been excluded from his own culture’s burial rituals, which has highlighted how deeply colonialism fractured his own world. However, in both cases, suicide has been an existential act as a final act of self-determination by men who have found themselves powerless in a changing world.

The question then is whether death may not permit us to view the *Dasein* in its totality. For death sets a term for existence. *Dasein* is 'finished' the at death and no longer 'ex-sists' in the sense of going out into the new. Yet it might be wondered whether *Dasein* is not so thoroughly finished at death that it becomes impossible grasp the *Dasein* altogether, for death finished *Dasein* in the sense of abolishing existence rather than completing it. (Macquarrie, p.194)

Macquarrie's existential perspective on death has explained how both character's death has not brought closure or clarity but rather highlighted how their lives were left and abandoned unfinished and disconnected from that world that once has been theirs. Both their deaths have not been peaceful or heroic, but rather an act of desperation. Ajax's death has not taken a place in the battlefield where death is considered noble, it has been a lonely shameful death after slaughtering the animal because of his madness and delusion. His legacy has been debated and not celebrated, he has been denied a full warrior burial and has been placed in a suicide coffin like a dishonored man. This has been the strongest indicator that his life has ended with no achievement, but his death has left questions but no answers about who he really was and what he has stood for because of his alienation. Okonkwo on the other hand has been denied to be buried by his own brothers and people, because he has hanged himself which is forbidden in his culture, like Ajax, there is nothing heroic and noble about Okonkwo's death, but rather a strong sign of his disconnection from his society. Macquarrie's idea of *Dasein* has emphasized that a person's existence is not complete until death gives their life a final shape, but only if their deaths has made sense. In both character's cases, their deaths does not complete or fulfill their lives, rather it has been an interruption. Their act of suicide has been a response to cultural collapse not a personal fulfillment. Their lives no longer have had meaning because they have been abandoned by their own world. Therefore, their deaths have only highlighted that they no longer exist to the world they have lived for.

“ Il n'y a qu'un problème philosophique vraiment sérieux : c'est le suicide. Juger que la vie vaut ou ne vaut pas la peine d'être vécue, c'est répondre à la question fondamentale de la philosophie” (Camus,1942, p.17). Camus has opened his book *Le mythe de Sisyphus (1942)*, with these powerful words. he has introduced suicide as not a psychological matter, but as the most

significant philosophical concern of all. The absurd, according to Camus, has appeared when “le besoin de clarté de l’homme se heurte au silence déraisonnable du monde” (Camus, 1942, pp.28-33). In Achebe’s *Things fall apart*, Okonkwo has experienced this same interruption not in abstract way, but in the disintegration of his cultural and historical world. His suicide has not only meant a tragic end to a character but a confrontation with absurdity. Everything that has once shaped Okonkwo’s self, his values and the structures around him have now appeared as blights of the world. As Camus’s man who has realized that “le monde lui meme n’est pas raisonnable, voila ce qui est tout ce qu’on peut en dire” (Camus, p.33). Rather, Okonkwo has come to understand that the world he had known was gone. His last act must be interpreted not only in Igbo cultural terms but also through the existential rebellion and defeat. Thus this philosophical argument has profoundly intensified the understanding of Okonkwo’s suicide as a response to a loss of meaning.

From the beginning, Okonkwo has identified himself with masculine, strength and the strict codes of honour in his society. His hatred for his father Unoka, has not only been emotional, it has been existential.

but his whole life was dominated by fear, the fear of failure and of weakness. It was deeper and more intimate than the fear of evil and capricious gods and of magic, the fear of the forest, and of the forces of nature, malevolent, red in tooth and claw (Achebe, pp. 10- 11).

Okonkwo has lived to contradict that weakness, but his definition of strength has completely been tied to social hierarchy no longer in existence. As colonial powers have disrupted Igbo institutions, religion, justice kinship. Achebe has emphasized that “The white man had indeed brought a lunatic religion, but he had also built a trading store and for the first time palm-oil and kernel became things of great price, and much money flowed into Umuofia” (Achebe, p. 130). Okonkwo has found himself in a world where his strength has no longer worked. This has resonated with Camus’s statement “Obéir à la flamme, c’est à la fois ce qu’il y a de plus facile et de plus difficile. Il est bon cependant que l’homme, en se mesurant à la difficulté, se juge quelquefois. Il est seul à pouvoir le faire” (Camus, p.91). Okonkwo’s reality, the necessity of strength and resistance has imprisoned him

when the social ground which previously sustained these standards has gone. He has been incapable of rebuilding meaning by his own devices, he has submitted to despair. This downfall, has resulted in a comparison between Okonkwo and Camus's ultimate character of the absurd Sisyphus. Condemned by the gods to roll a rock up a hill for forever, Sisyphus defines them not by avoiding his destiny, but by accepting it. Camus has written "son destin lui appartient. Son rocher est sa chose. De même, l'homme absurde, quand il contemple son tourment, fait taire toutes les idoles" (Camus , p. 167) . In claiming the absurd, Sisyphus has found freedom in struggle. As Camus noted "il faut imaginer Sisyphe heureux "(Camus, p.168). Okonkwo, however, has not been able to redefine the struggle as purposeful. He has attempted rebellion by killing the colonial messenger as a gesture of defiance, but it has failed.

Okonkwo stood looking at the dead man. He knew that Umuofia would not go to war. He knew because they had let the other messengers escape. They had broken into tumult instead of action. He discerned fright in that tumult. He heard voices asking: why he do it? (Achebe, p. 149)

At this moment, Okonkwo has come to understand that he has stood alone and the world has moved on, and he has not been able to turn it back. Contrary to Sisyphus, who has continued to push the rock in full awareness of its futility, Okonkwo has found no glory in struggle with no prospect of winning. His suicide has been both a refusal to live under the new condition and to be part of the endless, unacknowledged struggle that Camus has celebrated. This comparison has revealed how the absurd has become more resonant when placed within a colonial context. The absurd for Okonkwo has not remained simply metaphysical struggle; it has become more historical and political. Okonkwo's existential crises has been compounded by the destruction of his society.

The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers, and our clan can no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart.(Achebe , p 129) .

The absurd, for Okonkwo, has not been so much the silence of the world, it has been the repression of culture, language, and tradition. When Camus has written that "la lutte elle-même vers

les sommets suffit à remplir un cœur d'homme" (Camus, p. 168). He has assumed that the individual still has owned the agency to rebel, but Okonkwo's rebellion has been greeted with indifference and alienation. The colonial state, like the absurd has not responded to defiance. Achebe has made Camus's existential optimism complicated: when revolt has lost significance by political domination, suicide may no longer be philosophical defiance but cultural destruction. This interpretation has given new insight to the tragic weight of Okonkwo's final act. He has failed to survive in a world where his principles a proud heart and a warrior's resolve are called madness or savagery. Achebe illustrated Okonkwo final act and his loss of meaning and purpose noting that

Obierika, who had been gazing steadily at his friend's dangling body, turned suddenly to the District Commissioner and said ferociously: 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 , p.151)

The universe has not only failed to offer meaning to Okonkwo, but it has actively replaced it with an entirely foreign and imposed order. What has once been a coherent social, spiritual, and cultural system grounded in ritual, ancestry, and warrior codes has now been replaced by colonial bureaucracy, Christian theology, and governing system that disregard the native worldview of Umuofia. This loss has not been abstract. It has taken concrete form in the disintegration of communal values, the silence of the elders, and the paralysis of the clan. Okonkwo has not simply witnessed the wearing away of his world; he has suffered the existential despair of being made obsolete within it. In this sense, his suicide has not only been a personal declaration of rejecting life, but it has turned into a disastrous declaration of the impossibility of continuing any form of authentic existence in a world where the familiar has vanished and where the meanings he has lived by have been mocked, criminalized, or forgotten. His final decision to hang himself, an act which his own people have considered abominable, constitutes a critical collapse not only between man and society, but between man and meaning itself. Achebe, through this description, has created a powerful and tragic counterpoint to Camus's vision of the absurd hero. Where Camus, in *The myth of Sisyphus*

(1942), has envisioned the absurd man as one who embraces meaninglessness with defiant joy finding freedom in revolt and persistence, Achebe has painted the painful cost of such a revolt when it occurs in a context of colonial devastation. Camus has argued that “La lutte elle même vers les sommets suffit a remplir un cour d’homme ” and thus concluded, “Il faut imaginer Sisyphe heureux” (Camus, 1942, p. 168). But Okonkwo cannot imagine himself happy rolling his boulder, because the hill he has climbed has been demolished by imperial machinery. His strength, his pride, and his will have been shaped by cultural values that have ceased to work under the rule of colonial dominance. The absurd, for Okonkwo, has not been metaphysical. It has been historical and violent. It has not come in the form of cosmic silence, but as institutional domination, where meaning has not been lost but forcibly overwritten.

Achebe’s appropriation of tragedy and abrogation of comedy

Achebe’s *Things fall apart* has not only been one of the foundational texts in African literature, but also a strong response to how African stories have often been told through the eyes of the Europeans. Achebe’s novel does not only talk about the damage caused by colonialism, it also has changed how stories about African literature have been interpreted. Achebe has achieved his work through utilizing and reshaping the Western storytelling into forms of tragedy, while he has refused and denied the colonial ways of mocking African people through comedy. These two strategies have reflected the post-colonial concepts of appropriation and abrogation as it has been mentioned in Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin in *The empire writes back* (2002). These scholars have argued that “Appropriation is the process by which the language is taken and made to ‘bear the burden’ of one’s cultural experience” (Ashcroft et al, p.38) and “Abrogation as a refusal of the categories of the imperial culture” (Ashcroft et al, p.37).

Achebe’s appropriation and transformation of tragedy

Achebe has adopted the Western idea of tragedy, which usually focused on a great man who has been brought down by personal weakness, and used it to show the fall not just of the tragic hero but of the whole society. Like the famous tragic hero Oedipus, Okonkwo has a *hamartia*, a tragic flaw which has been his fear of weakness. “The term ‘Hamartia’ is mostly related to the Greek tragedy that refers to a ‘miss marked’ or ‘fault’. This term is currently used as the meaning of offence or sin. (Oxford Dictionary). ‘Hamartia’ actually, means the sudden fall of the protagonist leading him to a tragic end” (Ali, and C. Talukder, A. p.63). But Achebe has given this Western form a new meaning placing it under an African context. Okonkwo’s downfall has also been the downfall of the Igbo society, caused by the colonial invasion. Achebe utilized tragedy as a tool to reveal the unbearable suffering of the colonized Africa.

Ashcroft et al have demonstrated that appropriation is “the process by which language is taken and made to ‘bear the burden’ of one’s own cultural experience” (Ashcroft et al, p.38). Achebe has used the English language of the colonizers, and changed its structure through integrating the Igbo proverbs, idioms, and their ways of thinking. Achebe has written in English to spread the African culture to prove to the Western colonizers that the African traditional society has its own laws, religion, political system, and human experiences, and reshape the African worldview. Ashcroft explained that “the literary work is the field within which the word announces its purpose” (Ashcroft et al, p.43). This has shown that in a literary text, language has been used to create new meanings, and it is the suitable place for it to reveal its powers, and show its purposes. Achebe’s main focus has not been directed towards the individual only. Okonkwo’s downfall has portrayed the larger collapse of the Igbo culture and its loss of control against the colonial forces. He illustrated how the tragic forms can be used in telling the colonized histories. As Ashcroft et al has noted that “language constitutes reality in an obvious way”, and that language has not been just a neutral tool but something that “interprets the world in practice” (Ashcroft et al, p.43). Achebe’s use of language

and structure has proved that even Western genres and style of writing can be remodeled and reshaped to fit the African literature.

Achebe has changed how we perceive the tragic flaw. Okonkwo's fear of being seen as weak has been derived from his father's failure. But this personal weakness has been deeply connected to the outside oppression brought by colonialism. Achebe has shown both Okonkwo's internal and external conflict. Okonkwo has not just been a tragic figure in general, but his life has been shaped by the Igbo values. His fear of being perceived as feminine, his passion for war, and his inability to change all have reflected the African culture. Achebe has relied on the idea of tragedy to show to the world how colonialism has poisoned and erased traditional African values. His goal was not to see tragedy as a story of an individual's failure, but as something that happened to societies when they have been torn apart by external forces.

Achebe's work has been a unique piece of literature, because of the way he transformed the tragedy to fit the African colonial experience. He created a new tragic figure in Okonkwo, through appropriating tragedy that has been seen in Oedipus. As we have mentioned before, Achebe has highlighted the breakdown not only of his character Okonkwo, but also of the entire African cultures. However, unlike the tragic heroes who have fell due to ignorance, Achebe has twisted the tragedy of his hero Okonkwo who has collapsed because the truth has been clear for him, but he has been unable to communicate or act within the gradually changing world. This reinterpretation and reappropriation of tragedy has offered a deeper understanding of the colonial processes towards destroying and erasing the indigenous cultures.

Levi-Strauss in his book *Anthropology structurale deux* (1996), has discussed the deep structure of myths like that of Oedipus. He has explained how myths have been built on miscommunication, riddles and final moments of tragic truth. In the myth of Oedipus, the hero solves the Sphinx's riddle. However, this victory has led to his fall, because it has revealed the hidden forbidden truth of him marrying his own mother and killing his father. Oedipus has

constantly asked questions but he often refused to listen to the answers, accused others of conspiracy, and his final realization that the signs have always been there, but his arrogance and ignorance have blinded him from uncovering and understanding the truth. As Lévi-Strauss wrote “Le mariage avec Jocaste ne suit donc pas arbitrairement la victoire sur le Sphinx” (Lévi-Strauss, p. 34). This has illustrated that Oedipus’s intelligence and his ability to solve the enigma has not been only heroic but also tragic. Therefore, his knowledge has become the source of his destruction. The riddle has been both a literal and a symbolic communication test. Oedipus has interpreted it, but he has failed to interpret his own life. His tragedy has been forwardly linked to his problem of communication of not knowing the meaning of his actions.

Achebe has followed the lead of Lévi-Strauss in giving a communicative twist to the Freudian theory of the Oedipus’ myth classical tragic pattern and twisted it. In Achebe’s *Things fall apart*, Okonkwo has been a strong proud man who has lived by the traditions of his own village. But the colonial rule took over his world and gradually fell apart. Unlike Oedipus, who has discovered the riddle, Okonkwo’s tragedy has been his inability to solve anything because he cannot communicate. The failure of communication has been central to his end. Okonkwo has often been silent when he should have spoken. Okonkwo could not express his sorrow, fear, and despair; because he believed it has been a form of weakness, but rather his only way to communicate has been violence and anger. He has failed to build a relationship with his own son Nwoye who has immediately converted to Christianity after the arrival of the missionaries, because Okonkwo could not connect with him, instead of talking to him he has always hit him and shouted at him. This emotional silence has isolated Okonkwo from his surroundings. This has reflected what Lévi-Strauss said about how myths change. He writes “un personnage subtil, qui connaît toutes les réponses, fait place à un innocent, qui ne sait même pas poser de question” (Lévi-Strauss, p. 33). Okonkwo has become someone who could no longer ask the right questions. In his case, it has not been innocence, but pride and fear that has blocked his ability to speak. He does not know how to question the

changes in his world, this has led him to become more silent and more violent towards his family and then towards himself. His violence has led him to his tragic suicidal death. Okonkwo's tragic suicide has not been a result of knowledge, but of frustration and miscommunication.

In classical tragedies, the hero has been a respected well-spoken figure. Oedipus has been respected for his intelligence, even when he had fallen down. But Okonkwo has been ignored. His word and presence have become absurd in his society. Killing the messenger has been a desperate act to expect his people to rise and fight with him, but nobody has stood with him, and finally he could not explain himself to anyone and died in silence. This failure of communication has made Achebe's tragedy different. Lévi-Strauss has argued that "énigme vivante personnifiée par le héros" (Lévi-Strauss, p.34). In Achebe's *Things fall apart*, Okonkwo has been the riddle, but no one has solved him, and no one has understood him, neither the colonizers nor his own people. He has found himself in a world that no longer has spoken to him. He could not express himself in the changing world. Therefore, that has been Okonkwo's tragedy.

Achebe's tragic twist has had not provided a tragedy where knowledge has led to the tragic downfall. Instead, Achebe has presented a world where communication has failed. Okonkwo's inability to communicate with his world and the loss of his shared language, customs, and values have become meaningless. As Lévi-Strauss has explained that myths go through transformation "on cherchera si et dans quelle mesure les éléments caractéristiques d'un group peuvent être ramenés à des transformations (qui seront, ici des inversions) des éléments caractéristiques de l'autre group." (Lévi-Strauss, p.33). Lévi-Strauss has suggested in his quote how can the key elements of a myth in one culture can be transformed and reshaped to fit another culture. This strategy has been applied by Achebe on his tragic hero Okonkwo to express differently the African worldview. Achebe has added something new to tragedy. Okonkwo has not been the only one unable to communicate, but the Igbo society as a whole. The colonial domination does not care enough to understand the Igbo society,

instead they have separated the Igbo people through building churches. The tragedy has not only been related to Okonkwo's silence, but to the silence of the whole Igbo community.

Abrogation of comedy

Achebe in *Things fall apart*, has rejected the colonial use of comedy, a genre that has been weaponized to downgrade and dehumanize African way of life and reassure the imperial domination. Colonial literature has often described African characters as absurd and laughable, but Achebe has engaged in the postcolonial technique that Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin have defined as "a refusal of the categories of the imperial culture, its aesthetics, its illusory and fixed meaning 'inscribed' in the words"(Ashcroft et al, p.37). Achebe's abrogation has been deeply embedded in his language, dismantling the colonial comic lens through which African societies have been caricatured. Achebe's *Things fall apart* has resisted the European comic portrayal of Africans as lacking reason or intelligence. Western literature laughed at the supposed irrational African customs and beliefs. Achebe's refusal of the humiliation of African culture has been accompanied and supported by his presentation of the Igbo society as a complex and dynamic civilization, filled with rituals, customs, and ancestral legacy. This resistance has aligned with the concept of abrogation explained by Ashcroft et al in *The empire writes back*, "So, for example, because the traversal of the text by these conditions becomes so clear and so crucial in post-colonial literature, the idea of art existing for its own sake or of literature appealing to some transcendent human experience are both rejected. (Ashcroft et al, p.40). This quote has discussed how Achebe has written with a political and cultural purpose to correct the misinterpretations of Africa and to show how colonialism has disrupted Igbo values and authority rejecting that it has been for the sake of art or for a transcendent human experiences, but rather a form of resistance.

Even when Achebe has included humour in his novel, it has been quite different to the degrading laughter of the colonial comedy, but rather the warm and introspective humor of a living culture. Proverb exchange between the elders, and the playful debates among the Igbo people have

reflected a tradition full of life. The humor in Achebe's *Things fall apart* has upheld the dignity of his characters, turning what has been mocked into a cultural pride. This has affirmed what Ashcroft and his co-authors have observed about the language in postcolonial contexts. He argued that "Language is a material practice and as such is determined by a complex weave of social conditions and experience" (Ashcroft et al, p.40). Achebe's voice has been a self-aware resistance to colonial distortion. Achebe's abrogation of comedy has dismantled the imperial idea that has aimed to define Africa in the most primitive inappropriate ways. To do so, Achebe's portrays the Igbo as a community where contradictions and disagreements are a fundamental aspect of their society. Ashcroft et al have noted that "The inauthentic and marginal in fact the 'real'. Thus the conditions of post-colonial experience encouraged the dismantling of notions of essence and authenticity somewhat earlier than the recent expressions of the same perception in contemporary European post-structuralist theory" (Ashcroft et al, p.40). Achebe supported indigenous perspective and refused to follow the European comic traditions that disregarded the African experience.

The rejection of colonial comedy has also been connected to Achebe's use of language. According to *The empire writes back*, abrogation "refutes any the privileged position of a standard code in the language and any monocentric view of human experience" (Ashcroft et al, p.40). Achebe has opposed colonial "standards" of English by infusing his work with Igbo words and oral conventions, refusing to translate every expression or custom to give the Western reader the opportunity to wonder and make efforts to understand what Igbo culture has been built on. His literary work has assumed an audience that must approach the text with openness and humility. Just as Gabriel Okara's adaptation of the Ijaw language in English has disrupted the colonial linguistic superiority (Ashcroft et al, p.41), Achebe's hybrid language has done the same thing as it constructed a new literary space where the colonized subjects have spoken for themselves. Achebe has used Igbo terms like "Chi" (personal god), "eguwgwu" (ancestral spirits), and "umuada" (a family gathering of daughters) and other terms, expressions, and proverbs like "When the moon is shining the cripple

becomes hungry for a walk” (Achebe, p.8). All carry a deep cultural significance. Explaining or neutralizing these words and expressions has not been an option for Achebe, but rather he let them speak for themselves. This strategy has mirrored Ashcroft et al’s insight that “language interprets the world in practice, not some imputed referentiality” (Ashcroft et al, p.43).

The psychological effects of suicide

Suicide, as the ultimate act of self-destruction, has revealed not only a tragic end but also a profound psychological conflict embedded in identity, repression, and the unconscious. In Achebe’s *Things fall apart* and Fitch’s *Seneca Oedipus* (2004), the protagonist’s final acts of self-destruction have emerged not only from external crises but from internal psychic disintegration. Okonkwo’s literal suicide and Oedipus’s symbolic suicide through blinding have reflected a profound psychological collapse. Through Wright’s application of psychoanalytic theory in *Psychoanalytic criticism: theory in practice* (1984), both characters can be understood as subjects of repressed trauma and fragmented identities. Their suicide has ultimately dramatized the failure of repression and the return of the real. Wright has emphasized that for Freud, repression serves as the ego’s attempt to protect itself from unacceptable impulses or truths “the ego finds itself threatened by the pressure of the unacceptable wishes. Memories of these experiences...become charged with unpleasurable feeling, and are thus barred from consciousness. This is the operation known as repression” (Wright, p. 15). The mechanism, then, serves as a psychic gate-keeping process, maintaining coherence and control within the subject. However, Wright also stresses that repression is ultimately unstable, citing Freud’s own words “the essence of repression lies simply in turning something away, and keeping it at a distance from the conscious (Wright, p.15). This temporary distancing does not eliminate the repressed materials, which instead returns in distorted forms through symptoms, repetitions, or actions that the subject cannot explain.

Both Okonkwo and Oedipus have exemplified this return of the repressed. Their actions have not arisen from conscious awareness, but from a build-up of a rejected knowledge. Their suicides have served as the climax of unresolved inner conflicts, where the truth, once hidden, has exploded into their consciousness with devastating consequences. Throughout the narrative, Okonkwo the central figure in Achebe's *Things fall apart*, has been introduced as a man of strength, fame, and masculinity. As Achebe described in his novel "Okonkwo was well known throughout the nine villages and even beyond. His fame rested on solid personal achievement. As a young man of eighteen he had brought honour to his village by throwing Amalinze the cat" (Achebe, p.3). He has built his success on hard work and an iron will, earning titles and respect in a society that values strength and achievement. "He was a very strong man and rarely felt fatigue" (Achebe, p.11). However, despite this exterior image lies a profound psychological vulnerability. Thus, Okonkwo's fear of weakness has governed his every thought, decision, and interpersonal relationship. From the beginning, he has denied and rejected all that he associates with his father, Unoka a man he sees as weak. "In his day he was lazy and improvident and was quite incapable of thinking about tomorrow" (Achebe, p. 3), poor "he was poor and his wife and children had barely enough to eat" (Achebe, p. 4). In psychoanalytic terms, this reflects the classic oedipal rejection and replacement dynamics, wherein the son defines his ego in opposition to the father figure (Wright, p.14). Okonkwo, in his refusal of everything Unoka stands for, has developed an identity centered on strength, violence, and control. He has interpreted any sign of emotion or compassion as weakness and has responded to his fears by repressing them and adopting a hyper-masculine posture. This inner tension has shaped his interaction with his family and community, creating a rigid psyche unable to accommodate change or contradiction. Achebe emphasized that "His whole life was dominated by fear, the fear of failure and of weakness. It was deeper and more intimate than the fear of evil" (Achebe, p. 10). Wright has emphasized that the formation of identity is interconnectedly tied to the process of repression, where

the ego defends itself against psychic threats by excluding disturbing elements from consciousness.

She also argued that

The term 'repression' in its second and more generally known sense is used by Freud to disintegrate repression proper or 'after-pressure' (XIV, p. 148): it serves to keep guilt-laden wishes out of conscious experience. The symptoms, dreams and parapraxes ('Freudian slips') that turn up in the course of this process represent the 'return of the repressed', a mechanism that marks both the emergence of the forbidden wish and the resistance to it (Wright, p. 16).

This voice of repression has turned Okonkwo's fear of being weak into a constant need to display strength and suppress any form of emotion. Rather than evolving into a balanced identity, his ego has been built defensively, trying to distance itself from the shameful image of his father. This has led to rigid control over his own emotional expression and an obsession with dominance. He has beaten his wives during the sacred week. As it is mentioned in the novel "he beat her very heavily" (Achebe, p. 22), killing Ikemefuna to assert his manhood "Okonkwo drew his machete and cut him down. He was afraid of being thought weak" (Achebe, p. 44), and ultimately rejected the new colonial order that threatens his values. These acts of excessive aggression are not simply cultural assertions but the return of repressed psychic conflicts, appearing in violence.

Similarly, Oedipus has been driven by his unconscious mind to uncover a truth that he simultaneously wishes to avoid as Wright has explained that "The unconscious is dynamic, consisting of instinctual representatives, idea, and images originally fixated in a moment of repression" (Wright, p.10). Oedipus identity as a king, husband, and savior of Thebes has been constructed on a repressed reality that "he was fated to kill his father and marry his mother" (Fitch, p.3). He has not known that the man he has killed at the crossroad is his father, nor the woman he has married is his mother. Fitch writes "My mind turns over its cares and revisits its fears. The powers above and below declare that Laius died through a crime of mine, but on the other hand my mind, which is innocent and better known to itself than to the gods" (Fitch, p.83). His actions have been done in ignorance, not with criminal intent, which has made his fate more tragic. He has been both innocent and guilty at the same time. What has made the tragedy even more profound is the

psychological journey that Oedipus has been through. He has repressed the painful signs of truth for as long as possible. The prophecy he has tried to escape has returned as repressed truth, consistent with Wright's emphasis on how psychic mechanism like repression structure identity by keeping forbidden truths unconscious.

Oedipus's entire life has been shaped by the efforts to deny the bad truth. He has lived in a constant state of anxiety, ignoring and pushing away any sign that would confirm the prophecy. He has done everything to escape his fate. Yet, despite his efforts, every step he made has driven him to be close to fulfill it. His determination on uncovering the truth has not only been a search for justice, but also a self-destructive drive of his unconscious mind's search for his true identity. This inner contradiction has been constructed overtime leading him to a state of increasing tension. Oedipus's moment of realization that he has been the son of Laius and Jocasta, not only his external world shattered, but this truth has led him to his psychological breakdown. As Wright has emphasized, "The symptoms, dreams and parapraxes ('Freudian slips') that turn up in the course of this process represent the 'return of the repressed', a mechanism that marks both the emergence of the forbidden wish and the resistance to it" (Wright, p.12). The unconscious truths, no matter how deeply buried, find their way to the surface. In Oedipus's case, this return of the repressed has arrived in the form of unbearable knowledge, the truth that has destroyed his entire life. The king who once has been considered the savior and the protector of Thebes, has now come face to face with the reality that he is the source of his and his world's downfall. His blinding has not only been an act of self-punishment, but an erasure of the self that has unknowingly committed incest. He has not only lost his sight; he has shattered the false image of himself that he has held onto. Jocasta's suicide also serves as a parallel collapse as her moment of realization of the truth has been too much to handle and saw death as the only way to escape.

In both Okonkwo and Oedipus, their final actions of suicide and self-blinding, have not only arisen from external defeat, but from a much deeper internal crisis. These acts have been shaped by

psychological forces that they have failed to confront. Okonkwo has built his entire identity on the rejection of weakness, a childhood experience of his father's perceived failure. His strong attachment to strength and control has made him incapable of adapting to the changing world. When Umuofia begins to shift under the colonial rule, Okonkwo has seen not only the loss of his cultural authority, but also the collapse of the ideals that have defined his self-hood. To live in this new world would mean accepting values he has always repressed and despised. Hanging himself has become the final act of a man whose inner structure cannot bend, but rather only break. Likewise, Oedipus has been undone by the discovery that the very actions he has repressed are the ones that define him. His entire role as a moral and political leader has been shattered. When the truth surfaces, it appeared with a strong clarity that his sense of self cannot handle it. Wright's theory of repression and the return of the repressed have given us the perspective to understand this inward collapse, "The censorship of the ego can be subverted, however, precisely because of the free shifting of energy in the primary so-called 'compromise formations' of the return of the repressed" (Wright, p.12). These disguised long buried wishes have eventually erupted in destructive ways. Oedipus does not die physically, but psychologically.

In both cases, we have seen the destructive power of identities built on repression and denial. These characters have not simply met tragic ends because of fate or external forces, they have been ruled by unresolved and repressed psychological conflicts. Ignoring or suppressing those conflicts has come with a high cost. Both Okonkwo and Oedipus have paid with their lives, once the truth they have tried hard to avoid have finally crossed their ways. The final acts of suicide and blinding have not represented their weakness, but the accumulation of feelings of a long and painful inner fight. These are not decisions made in moments of desire or instinct; they have been the only options left for men whose constructed identities no longer align with the realities confronting them. Through their tragic ends, they reveal the psychological price of the repression and the tragic consequences of an identity that cannot bear contradictions. Wright's insight into the dynamics of the

unconscious helps us understand that these are not only personal failures, but a human response to the unbearable inner conflict. As she has noted that “the father is experienced as the source of all authority, all direction of desire, and thus as a capable of castrating the boy-child” (Wright, p. 14). This internalized authority has structured desire, fear, and self-worth, when the foundation has been built upon, it begins to crumble. The psyche can no longer hold, so the price of repression is not only psychic, but in the cases of Okonkwo and Oedipus is a total collapse.

Suicide versus collective violence

Fanon’s *The wretched of the earth* (1968) has provided a strong perspective through which we shall analyse the theme of violence in Achebe’s *Things fall apart*, in relation to Okonkwo’s experience of psychological and social disintegration. Fanon has emphasized that colonialism cannot be taken down without force because it has been built on the foundational violence of domination and oppression. Fanon noted that “decolonization is always a violent phenomenon” (Fanon, p.53). This idea has been an important value in the Igbo traditional society that has been violently disfigured by the arrival of the British colonizer. Fanon has also noted that decolonization does not revolve around only on political powers and removing colonial rules and changing governments, but in the redefinition of the way people see themselves and others as human beings, the colonizers have dehumanized the colonized, so reclaiming the political power is not enough. The true freedom requires to set an end to these ideas and regain the full humanity, dignity, and the identity of the oppressed people. Fanon has argued that “For he knows that he is not an animal; and it is precisely at the moment he realizes his humanity that he begins to sharpen the weapons with which he will secure the victory” (Fanon, p.43).

In Achebe’s *Things fall apart*, Okonkwo has been the major representative and the symbol of the pre-colonial masculinity, and clan-based honour. However, the arrival of the colonial authorities has challenged his world’s values. As he has witnessed the white men’s taking over gradually the

authority and crushing the Igbo sacred traditions and values, Okonkwo has become desperate to resist. Fanon has argued that “decolonization transforms spectators crushed with their inessentiality into privileged actors” (Fanon, p.36). In Achebe’s novel, Nwoye, Okonkwo’s son has embodied this shift.

Although Nwoye had been attracted to the new faith from the very first day, he kept it a secret. He dared not to go near the missionaries for fear of his father. But whenever they came to parch in the open marketplace or the village play ground, Nwoye was there. And he was already beginning to know some of the simple stories they told. (Achebe, p.110).

He has embraced Christianity and colonial institutions, seeking for a new identity. For Fanon, such a transformation is a part of the violent process of colonialism. He believes that “In the colonial context the settler only ends his work of breaking in the native when the latter admits loudly and intelligibly the supremacy of the white man’s values” (Fanon, p43) where the native has been taught to see their own culture as inferior and consider to submit to the new one.

However, Okonkwo has refused to become a “spectator” to his own cultural collapse and turned to be a “privileged actor” in order to reclaim his identity and voice. Fanon has claimed that “Decolonization never takes place unnoticed, for it influences individuals and modifies them fundamentally” (Fanon, p.63). Okonkwo’s true identity has been built on warrior traits and leadership, but the colonial forces have stripped him away from it. When the white men have imprisoned the leaders of Umoefia and have humiliated them, Okonkwo has reached his limits which have led him to murder of the white man’s messenger as a final act of resistance. This act of violence has been very significant, not random, but it has symbolized Okonkwo’s attempt to rebel rejecting violently the colonial rule. But his act has not been met with support, but with silence. Achebe mentioned that “He knew Umoefia would not go to war. He knew because they had let the other messenger escape. They had broken into tumult instead of action.” (Achebe, p.149). The violence that Okonkwo has done has been ineffective, because the Igbo’s determination to resist had not existed in the first place. Fanon has noted that colonialism is the “bringer of violence into the home

and into the mind of native” (Fanon, p.38). Okonkwo has been the perfect example for this internalized violence. His despair, rage, and suicide have steamed from the trauma of watching his world fall apart and his values unappreciated.

When he has realized that his people will not stand on his side in resistance, his sense of self has collapsed. His suicide has not been just an individual act, but a final consequence of the colonial disruption of the traditional Igbo. Fanon has claimed that

The violence which has rules over the ordering of the colonial world, which has ceaselessly drummed the rhythm for the destruction of the native social forms and broken up without reserve the system of the reference of the economy, the costumes of dress and external life, that the same violence will be claimed and taken over by the native at the moment when, deciding to embody history in his own person, he surges into the forbidden quarters. (Fanon, p. 40)

Okonkwo’s death has been the result of the colonizers’ violence that they have implanted in the colonized subjects. Okonkwo’s violence has been the result of his failure to resist against them when he tried to make his own history through his desperate rebellion against the colonizers. Killing the messenger has been an act of the violence that colonizers have applied against him and his tribe. Therefore, it destroyed him and his hopes for the prosperity of his village. His suicide has turned out to be the tragic endpoint of the colonial system that has shattered identity.

Fanon has discussed the psychological effects of colonization, precisely how the domination of the colonizers has affected the mental well-being and identity of the natives. This system that has been shaped by violence and oppression has destroyed their sense of self. He has claimed that “Because it is a systematic negation of the other person and furious determination to deny the other person all attributes of humanity, colonialism forces the people it dominates to ask themselves the question constantly: “In reality, who am I?” (Fanon, p.250). Therefore, the people of the Igbo society depicted the effects of colonization on their psyche and subconscious. It has shaped their actions towards one another and towards the colonizers. Okonkwo himself has struggled with his persona. In every decision he has to make, he has found himself puzzled by his inner thoughts,

morals, and the Igbo versus British colonizers expectations. The colonizers have already made his people question themselves and their identity after they made their own culture look inferior compared to the white men's culture.

Fanon has described how colonial violence has led to constant mental disorders. He has identified these disorders not only as individual pathologies, but as a social and political conditions that have been caused by the colonial domination. He added that "These disorders which persist for months on end, making a mass attack against the ego, and practically always leaving as their sequel a weakness which is almost visible to the naked eye." (Fanon, p. 252). He has illustrated this idea with a case of a former militant who has placed a bomb and killed ten people. The man's loyalty to the resistance has made him suffer mentally from anxiety, insomnia, and most importantly suicidal obsessions "This militant, who never for a single moment thought of repudiating his past actions realized very clearly the manner in which he himself had to pay the price of independence" (Fanon, p.253). Fanon has given this case to prove that violence leaves a strong psychological imprint even when the native has been committed to resistance. These mental disorders have been created by both the violence they have taken and the violence they have committed. In Achebe's *Things fall apart*, Okonkwo has committed an act of violence by killing the colonial messenger which is an act of desperate resistance, but this act has not been supported by his tribe. Therefore, his resistance has been an absurd act of violence which made him feel isolated. He has refused to accommodate with the colonial rule. Just like the militant who has suffered from anxiety and insomnia, Okonkwo has been trapped between the values that have shaped and constructed his identity and the new colonial values of Christianity. Both Okonkwo and the militant have been psychologically drained and destroyed by colonialism.

Conclusion

It has followed from the above analysis that Achebe's *Things fall apart* has provided a deeply complex and multidimensional exploration of suicide as both personal and collective act, rooted in rich sociological, philosophical, psychological, anthropological, postcolonial and cultural contexts. From a sociological perspective, the novel has explored how Okonkwo's final act has reflected all four types of suicide proposed by Durkheim. His deep integration into the Igbo society has aligned with altruistic suicide, while the alienation brought on by colonial disruption has mirrored the egoistic type. The disintegration of traditional norms has contributed to anomic tendencies, and finally, the rigid pressures of colonial dominations that have left Okonkwo with no room for agency or escape.

Existentially, the novel has mirrored the tragic journeys of Oedipus and Ajax, whose downfalls have resulted from identity crises and alienation in a collapsing world. Okonkwo, much like these Greek figures, has confronted a world that no longer sustains the values upon which his selfhood has depended. His inability to reconcile his internal sense of worth with the external social changes has led to an existential collapse, making his suicide not just a personal failure, but a philosophical act of rebellion though unlike Camus's Sisyphus, Okonkwo has not found meaning in revolt, but despair in its futility. His act has therefore, embodied Camus's absurd condition, intensified by colonial forces.

Psychologically, Okonkwo has carried pain and fear from his past. He has always tried to be strong, hiding his emotions. But inside, he has struggled with fear of weakness and shame. These hidden feelings have built up over time, until he could no longer carry them. Wright's theory has helped us see that his actions show signs of deep inner conflict, leading to his tragic end.

From a postcolonial view, Achebe's novel has employed the strategies of appropriation and abrogation, as discussed by Ashcroft, et al in *The empire writes back*. Achebe has appropriated the western tragic form to tell an African story, reshaping it to reflect the collective downfall of the Igbo society under colonialism. Through abrogation, he has rejected the colonial comic portrayal of

Africans as primitive. Instead, he presented the Igbo society as complex and dignified. Lévi-Strauss's structural analysis of myths further illuminates how Achebe has transformed the tragic narrative, replacing the classical hero's ignorance with Okonkwo's awareness and miscommunication, highlighting the broader cultural disintegration caused by colonialism. Fanon's theory of colonial violence in *The wretched of the earth* has helped us understand how colonialism has hurt the mind, not just the body. Fanon has shown that colonized people have often turned violence inward when they have felt powerless. In *Things fall apart*, we have seen how Okonkwo has become more violent as he has watched his culture be destroyed. At first, he has fought the colonizer, but in the end, when he has seen that his people have refused to resist, he has turned that violence on himself. Fanon has explained that this kind of self-destruction has been the result of a deep trauma caused by colonial oppression. Okonkwo's death has been the final result of the pressure, frustration, and helplessness that colonialism has created.

Putting all these perspectives together, we have come to see that Okonkwo's suicide has not just been about one man it has represented a much bigger. It has shown what happens when a culture has been broken, when a people have lost their voice, and when someone has felt completely alone in a world that no longer has understood them. Achebe's novel has given a powerful message that African lives, cultures, and histories.

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