

وزارة التعليم العالي والبحث العلمي

MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION & SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

ⵎⵓⵍⵓⵔ ⵎⵎⵎⵉⵔ ⵓⵎⵓⵔ ⵓⵣⵣⵓⵔ

ⵎⵓⵎⵎⵉⵔ ⵓⵎⵓⵔ ⵓⵣⵣⵓⵔ ⵎⵎⵎⵉⵔ ⵓⵎⵓⵔ ⵓⵣⵣⵓⵔ

ⵎⵓⵎⵎⵉⵔ ⵓⵎⵓⵔ ⵓⵣⵣⵓⵔ ⵎⵎⵎⵉⵔ ⵓⵎⵓⵔ ⵓⵣⵣⵓⵔ

Mouloud Mammeri University Of Tizi-Ouzou  
Faculty Of Letters And Languages  
Department Of English



جامعة مولود معمري – تيزي وزو  
كلية الآداب واللغات

قسم الانجليزية

Item number: .....

Serial number: .....

## Dissertation Submitted In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Master's Degree in English

Field: Letters and foreign languages

Branch: English language

Option: Literature and Civilization

### Theme

## Of the three faces of the hero in Achebe's *Things fall apart*

**Presented by:**

Katia Lacob

Lila Guennoun

**Supervised by:**

Professor, Sabrina Zerar

### Board of Examiners:

Bouteldja Riche,

Professor, University Mouloud Mammeri of Tizi-ouzou,

**Chair;**

Sabrina Zerar,

Professor, University Mouloud Mammeri of Tizi-ouzou,

**Supervisor;**

Sabeha Larabi,

MCA,

University Mouloud Mammeri of Tizi- ouzou,

**Examiner.**

Academic year: 2023-2024



## **Dedications**

I dedicate this modest work to my beloved parents who provide me with all their help and inspiration to resume my studies.

To the memory of my beloved husband, may Allah have mercy and forgiveness on him,  
To my dear sons Abderrahmane and Anes, my little angels, who are the true source of my strength and motivation to pursue my studies.

To all my family members, friends, colleagues in work.

Thank you,

**Mrs. Lila Guennoun.**

To my beloved mother, father and my brother Nabil.

To myself, me and I.

**Miss Katia LACEB**

## **Acknowledgments**

Throughout our career in producing this research, we have received immense support and assistance, as well as patience and generosity from many people. First and foremost, we would like to extend our warmest thanks to our supervisor, Professor Sabrina ZERAR, for her guidance, presence, and generosity throughout the year. Her efficient encouragement and valuable advice, along with her basic directions, insightful feedback, and constructive remarks, helped us develop our research. We would also like to give special thanks to the board of examiners, namely Professor Bouteldja RICHE, our gate of knowledge, for his continuous and efficient encouragement and support, which marked our career and shaped our path throughout our master's degree. Above all, we feel deeply grateful to him for making us true students eager for knowledge and success, and for providing us with a new vision of reality. We would also like to thank him for suggesting this outstanding topic of research, as we found his ideas always present to support our thesis. Our thanks also go to Doctor Sabeha LARABI for taking part in reading and examining our dissertation. Furthermore, we would like to thank the library staff for their continuous help in providing us with the necessary sources that led to the accomplishment of this work. Finally, we would like to express our deep appreciation to every individual who contributed to enriching this research through discussion, proofreading, or ideas.

*Filled with gratitude for your help.*

## Abstract

This research portrays the three different faces presented in Chinua Achebe's *Things fall apart* (1986): the epic figure, the problematic hero, and finally the tragic one, relying on Aristotelian tragedy and its main concepts. Through his portrayal of the protagonist Okonkwo, Achebe embodies the elements involved in Aristotle's poetics, which drive the novel to be a tragic work. It also highlights the value and high status of Achebe's novel, where the author skillfully creates a monument erected in celebration of a tragic figure, serving as a powerful device of resilience for indigenous cultures. In addition, the novel is seen as a means of post-colonial memory in grasping modern African identities. Throughout this research, we have mainly relied on Frye's *Anatomy of criticism*, borrowing his archetypal approach from his essay "Theory of genre" to analyze Achebe's tragic figure; Okpewho's *The epic in Africa* when illustrating Okonkwo as an epic hero; and Lukács' *The theory of the novel*, developing the idea of the problematic state as a displaced character. Finally, we focus on the dominant finding of the work, which is the tragic end of the hero, relying on Aristotle's *Poetics*. Achebe adopts post-colonial theory in order to celebrate African traditions and culture, which were totally disintegrated and deluded by imperial literary works that tend to break African unity and dignity, presenting the continent to the world as inferior and in need of civilization by the "masters." Class struggle, colonialism, and imperial dominance are well illustrated in the piece through the adoption of Lukács' and Bakhtin's Marxist approaches, in addition to the realistic mode that the author uses to allow readers to inhabit the characters' roles and their lives through reading the novel.

**Key words:** Archetype, epic, hero, Marxism, memory, monument, post-colonial memory, problematic, tragic.

## Contents

<b>Dedications .....</b>	<b>I</b>
<b>Acknowledgments.....</b>	<b>II</b>
<b>Abstract .....</b>	<b>III</b>
<b>Contents.....</b>	<b>IV</b>
<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Issue in context.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Method and materials .....</b>	<b>08</b>
<b>Post colonial theory.....</b>	<b>09</b>
<b>Africanizing the archetypal approach .....</b>	<b>09</b>
<b>Lukács’ and Bakhtin’s Marxist approaches .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Aristotelian poetics .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Results and Discussion .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Okonkwo as epic hero .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Okonkwo as problematic hero .....</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Okonkwo as a tragic figure .....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Obierika or the hero as intellectual.....</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>References .....</b>	<b>56</b>

## I. Introduction

Therefore, in every system of theology there is an umbilical point, an Achilles tendon which the finger of mother life has touched, and where the possibility of perfect knowledge has been impaired. The problem of the hero is to pierce himself (and therewith his world) precisely through that point; to shatter and annihilate that key knot of his limited existence. (Campbell, 1956, p.147)

This research entitled *Of the three faces of the hero in Achebe's Things fall apart* is originally inspired by our reading of Campbell's *The hero with a thousand faces* and Carlyle's *On heroes, hero-worship and the heroic in history*, in our Methodology and African Literature Master's seminars conducted by Professor Riche in the Department of English, University Mouloud Mammeri, Tizi-Ouzou. It is during these classes that we have discovered that the hero and heroism are embodiments of individual, social, political, and cultural ideals. These heroic figures whether of the present or the past are evoked to proudly celebrate our individual and/or collective accomplishments in the face of the obstacles that humans meet in their journey through life. Our interest in the issue of heroism in African literature has led us to conclude that unless we understand the types of heroes that a society celebrates through its various art forms, we cannot really grasp the reality of that society and its individual members as well as their economic and political ambitions. It is the centrality of heroism as key for understanding society in its historical evolution that has motivated our probing into the three faces of the hero in Achebe's first postcolonial novel, *Things fall apart* (1986).

The heroic figure in Achebe's *Things fall apart* (1986), with its three faces recalls first the pre-colonial period; the great Africa marked by an atmosphere of communal life, justice, and culture. Accordingly, by rejecting, rehabilitating and correcting throughout Okonkwo's epic face the deluding and biased image given by the white man whose Eurocentric vision considers Africa a primitive continent. From a man of heroic embodiment to a problematic one; Okonkwo in his Igbo society faces a clash of cultures and disintegration. He attempts to restore his glorious past, in other words, Africa's glorious past before the arrival of the white intruder in a disassembled society which in the first part of the novel has been pictured as a unified one. Though the writer fashioned

a tragic end to his main character, however, it comes around a sad ending in order to stay memorial. In the first place, Achebe touches the memory and reminiscence recalling a true recollection faithful to the past. In the second place, the writer shapes the historical shutter to represent the past. In the third place, Achebe places importance on the collective memory to avoid any political abuse.

The purpose of this research was to identify the three faces of the hero in Achebe's *Things fall apart* and the importance of heroic figure in this first post-colonial novel as it is also manifested in the two post-colonial counter canon novels Armah's *The beautiful ones are not yet born* (1968) and Ngugi's *A grain of wheat* (1967) as a response to the imperial entities and their legacies. The heroic figure whether from the past or the present serves the society and the individual in recognizing the economic, political and cultural characteristics of a given society. Throughout the celebration of Okonkwo, Achebe celebrates Africa and disrupts the nuanced image designed by the Eurocentric vision.

### **Issue in Context**

The three stages that Okonkwo passes through, give us the opportunity to shed light on the image of the hero and its importance in post-colonial literature, with reference to the post-colonial theory of writing back to the empire. In order to address the atrocities and consequences of colonization as well as the celebration of cultural identity of oppressed people in countries known once as colonies, the Nigerian novelist through his genuine writing incarnates the reader and makes him experience life in Igbo society, placing significant centrality on his main character, Okonkwo. The latter, illustrated as an epic hero serves as a means of celebrating Igbo culture and rehabilitating the timeless and static image given to Africa. It appears that since the onset of colonialism in the African land the Europeans have continued to describe Africans as sub-humans and barbaric. The Eurocentric vision tends to hide the existence of civilization in Africa, a nation that doesn't need any spiritual or civilizing missions. The last paragraph of Achebe's novel

highlights what those foreigners are capable of. A great man like Okonkwo, the hero of Igbo society has been slimmed down from a story, to a chapter and then to a paragraph by the district commissioner. The latter does not consider at all the heroic accomplishment of Achebe's main character, quite the contrary all his attention has been directed to Okonkwo's murder of the messenger and his suicide picturing a harsh, barbaric and primitive figure.

This post-colonial literary piece would be an example of intellectual nationalism aiming to correct erroneous insights about a nation. The history of a nation and its evolution are tied to its culture. Though the foreign intruders who sewed Africa's culture in their own manner, Africa's culture speaks for itself from oral tradition to written word like all the great nations. The development of African literature combines on one hand the real contemporary world and history (the realistic world of the past) and on the other hand myth and hero being a model of transformation and a positive change. In the oral tales, the hero is every man who accomplishes something beyond the normal range and moving through a change and transformation to become a part of society's culture and its embodiment. It seems to be a real interaction between the oral tradition and the developing literary tradition of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Heroic figures such as Sundiata known as the founder of the Mali Empire in West Africa whose story is steeped in legend and folklore, portraying him as a courageous warrior, skilled strategist, and visionary leader who united disparate kingdoms to form one of the most powerful empires in African history. Sundiata's leadership and legacy continue to be celebrated across Africa. Whether from the past or the present, a hero serves as a model to society, and like a TV tape that allows us to grasp society's perspectives and culture. Apart from Sundiata another remarkable heroic African figure is Chaka who was a Zulu chief founder of southern Africa's Zulu empire. He is credited with creating a fighting force that devastated the entire region; however, he is depicted by the occident as a harsh and barbarian figure. Chaka may refer also to the famous poem by Senghor; indeed, this heroic

figure is at the origin of his poem where Senghor restores him as a powerful symbol of African culture.

Seemingly, according to Carlyle, the figure of the hero and hero-worshipping are indispensable in each community around the globe and among nations of different origins. This research delves into the crucial role of the heroic figure in post-colonial literature, which became problematic a few years later in Africa. With an echo to Fanon's *The wretched of the earth* (1968), Fanon, the father of post-colonial theory fashioned a portrait of pre and post-colonial period in which he addressed tremendous issues including the cult of personality that has been transformed to a problem. In his chapter on National culture, Fanon warns the individual/intellectual on his crucial role in providing birth to a real African revolution. Fanon (1968) has reported:

In order to achieve real action, you must yourself be a part of a living part of Africa and of her thought; you must be an element of that popular energy which is entirely called forth the freeing, the progress, and the happiness of Africa. There is no place outside that fight for the artist or the intellectual who is not himself concerned with and completely at one with the people in the great battle of Africa and suffering humanity\_SékouTouré. (p.208)

The quote above is urging on the fact that Africa needs a national culture, a native intellectual who speaks for it, speaks about its heroes and their accomplishments, telling the stories of the past where glory and triumph reigned, standing against the foreign intruders who aim to destroy and disfigure the past of the oppressed people as well as the necessity of a collective action that encompasses the native intellectual and the masses.

In *The wretched of the earth* (1968), Fanon explores the phenomenon of the cult of personality within the context of decolonization and the struggle for liberation. The cult of personality refers to the elevation and glorification of a single charismatic leader, often to the point of deification, within a political movement or society. Fanon critiques the cult of personality as a manifestation of the authoritarian tendencies that can emerge within liberation movements. He warns against the dangers of placing excessive power and authority in the hands of a single individual, arguing that it can lead to the perpetuation of hierarchical and oppressive systems and can be used as a means to

maintain control over the masses. Fanon emphasizes the importance of collective action in the struggle for liberation. For Fanon, the intellectual plays a key role in the colonial and post colonial Africa. For him, the intellectual possesses the knowledge, skills, and critical thinking abilities to analyze the social, political, and economic conditions of his society without any dissolution from his community. Fanon (1968) has written: “The native intellectual who takes up arms to defend his nation’s legitimacy and who wants to bring proofs to bear out that legitimacy, who is willing to strip himself naked to study the history of his body, is obliged to dissect the heart of his people” (p.211).

Since 1958, *Things fall apart* continues to speak to contemporary perspectives and issues in Africa. The crucial role of the heroic figure of this post colonial literary piece recalls the understanding of the hero typicality that a society needs in order to catch society’s reality. Throughout times from ancient to present, the heroic figure seems to be very important for the individual and the community as a whole because it permits the recognition of the complexities of the human behavior and motivations. From the early times, individuals attempt to trace and make sense to the world around them; they always tend to develop their behavior, situations and way of life. They try to be responsible in order to serve their community and become its hero. Society also needs these heroes in order to take responsibility for actions, to claim triumph and success, provide others with hope and guidance leaving a heroic legacy and someone to publicly idolize.

*Things fall apart* (1986), the title itself is borrowed from Yeats’ poem “*The second coming*” (1920) reflecting the novel’s central theme of societal breakdown and upheaval, though it received tremendous critics and a huge popular admiration. A little attention has been given to the displacement of the main heroic figure of this first post colonial novel. As a novel surveyed from diverse perspectives *Things fall apart*, allows us to gain insights to hopefully contribute a little in the academic debate settled around Achebe’s main figure. Its hero has received a surface analysis; he has been viewed as a tragic hero who fits the novel’s title that is the collapse of the Nigerian

society accompanied by disillusionment after his suicide which in its turn has been criticized as a sign of bravery in one hand and cowardice in another, and has been illustrated as a violent character fitting the Eurocentric vision on Africa.

In his book *Bloom's moderns critical interpretation: Chinua Achebe's Things fall apart* (2010), he views Okonkwo as the epitome of heroism in the Igbo culture. Bloom gives an insight on the cultural heroism in Igbo land; however, he does not set this heroism within the context of the work on memory in the post-colonial period. Seemingly the writer reports Okonkwo's achievements, challenges and obstacles in his journey toward heroism. Bloom, has written "Okonkwo's accomplishments in Umuofia earned him the respect and honor of elders and the people" (p.42). Throughout the chapter the writer continues to relate Okonkwo's life as a journey toward heroism according to the Nigerian community. From heroic achievement to challenges that Achebe's main character confronts in his "quest for heroism". Bloom added: "Another barrier one is expected to overcome in the quest for heroism is the person's obligation to the society, which, of course, may adversely affect his individual quest for reputation" (p. 42).

Overall, Bloom depicts Okonkwo's life as the model hero of Igbo culture, an achieved heroism according to the writer. However, in our opinion, these assertions neglect the crucial role of the heroic figure in the context of memory and heroism restoration.

Begam (1997), in his article, *Achebe's Sense of an Ending: History and Tragedy in Things Fall Apart*, delves into the study of the three different endings of the novel's end in a post-colonial context. The first ending could be seen as a reconstruction of history. The second ending could be considered post colonial aiming to rehabilitate the image of Nigeria. The third ending of the novel's end has been demonstrated as tragic particularly due to the main character's suicide arguing that his tragic flaw \_arrogance\_ led Okonkwo to his decline as a personification of the downfall of the Igbo society relying on *Aristotle poetics* stating that a hero causes his own decline by a tragic flaw, or '*Harmatia*'. Though, Okonkwo has achieved triumph and stands above the

others like an archetypal hero, the writer seems to give no traits of heroism to Achebe's main character unless some epic sections that of being a warrior and enjoying physical strength. Thus, the epic portrait is ironical. "The larger effect of Achebe's opening is to establish Okonkwo as a particular kind of tragic protagonist: the great warrior who carries with him the fate of his people" (p. 336). Indeed, Begam sheds light on how Achebe views his past from both a historical and tragic angle. Nevertheless, Begam does not give any attention to Achebe's main character in the light of post colonial literature, which aims to correct history and celebrates its heroes.

Granqvist (1984), in his article *The Early Swedish Reviews of Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart and a Man of the People*, analyzes the novel from a post colonial perspective arguing that correcting the false image of Africa is operative, however the writer gives a superficial details on Achebe's heroic figure. It was enough for the writer to write some lines on Okonkwo in order to illustrate him as a harsh character. This brief and unfair description perpetuates a Eurocentric vision. The harshness implies roughness; especially in the context of Achebe's post colonial literary piece. It sheds light of the ongoing misrepresentation of Africa, portraying it as primitive, barbaric, and sub human. How such a heroic figure like Okonkwo has been given a very small paragraph with some surface details? "As TFA was assessed primarily as an illuminator of the white –black confrontation or as a novelistic paradigm of British colonial history, Okonkwo the book's harsh character was judged accordingly" (p. 399). Granqvist, (1984), has argued. Although Granqvist has studied Achebe's *Things fall apart* and mentioned Okonkwo in few lines, he does not give this main character the recognition he truly deserves as a representative of African heroism in the context of monumental figure.

The three faces of the hero in Achebe's *Things fall apart*, from an epic, to problematic, to tragic. The displaced character of Achebe is considered as an epic hero at the start beginning of the novel. According to Frye's *Anatomy of criticism*, the archetypal hero, characterized by courage, ethics and dignity in any given literary piece recalls mythology and literary tradition. In

Okpewho's *The epic in Africa*, the hero is viewed as a leader enjoying a noble career that matches with *Things fall apart's* protagonist. The latter throughout the novel, endures numerous barriers; alienation, instability and disintegration from his community where a clash of culture and class struggle have been settled. Thus, the end of the novel is a tragic one applying *Aristotle poetics*.

This research is principally interested in expanding Achebe's hero in *Things fall apart* into three facets by further developing the parallels between the African hero and the archetypal hero. Furthermore, the hero's significance whether from the past or the present in a given society, serves as an epitome grasping the economic, historical and political perspectives. As shown above in the literary review, little attention has been given to the displaced character of Achebe's *Things fall apart*. We have demonstrated that, indeed, Achebe's main character is perceived as an ironic hero\_ both tragic and primitive. But what the hero represents is deeper. It is a representation of a culture which is subject of unfair criticism, a representation of a clash of cultures and, of course, an exploration of the sense of heroism and how the hero should be? In Campbell's *The hero with a thousand faces*, it is argued that the hero undergoes a rebirth or a resurrection. Since, the consideration of Okonkwo as a hero, will he enjoy any resurrection by his foil Obierika? That intellectual the society needs.

## **II. Methods and materials**

To reach the above objectives, we shall deploy an eclectic approach consisting of the archetypal model, post-colonial theory, and a Marxist approach. The archetypal or mythopoeic approach relies on Frye's theory of genres in his *Anatomy of criticism* (1990). In his theory of genres, Frye develops the idea that the hero is the indicator of the genre. That is why we have borrowed it for the analysis of *Things fall apart*.

This approach provides insights into two fundamental concepts that will be used in this research regarding the image of the hero in *Things fall apart*: Condensation and displacement. The first concept, in literature can be defined as the amalgamation of several archetypal qualities into one character. The second one can refer to the transformation of the main themes or conflicts of the story into different forms. As presented above, Frye considers the archetypal hero as the central figure in literature, drawing from mythological and literary traditions tracing the literary genre. He observes that the hero must face displacement through a journey of trials and challenges that lead to personal growth, then, to a transformation in his career where he should have flaws which will lead him to his downfall in a cyclical mode.

### **Post-colonial theory**

The novel is written in a post-colonial theoretical framework, which is centered on the concepts of otherness and resistance. Writers of the colonized countries attempt to celebrate their cultural identities and traditional customs, seeking to regain Africa's dignity and challenge the distorted values attributed to African society. It also addresses the literature written by colonial powers which they use to justify colonialism through the perpetuation of images of the colonized as inferior, primitive and savage highlighting the concept of the 'others'. This theory will help us in discussing the thematic implications of the three faces of the hero and has a significant role in shaping the psychological matters of the colonized people. Additionally, it will shed light on the

character that Achebe celebrates depicting him as monument with a prominent status in post-colonial memory.

### **Africanizing the archetypal approach**

Frye is one of the most famous English scholars and literary critics of the twentieth century. In his *Anatomy of criticism* (1990), particularly the archetypal criticism essay, he focuses on the idea of 'displacement' which he describes as the transformation of myths into more realistic and plausible forms in literature. In other words, the displacement of individual perspective occurs when the reader reaches myth and fiction. In this regard, we find the work of the African writer Okpewho *The epic in Africa* (1975) where we try to africanize Frye's archetypal approach as a framework to deal with African literature, in general and its characters in particular by contextualizing Frye's elements to the African myths, folklore and oral traditions which provide a unique African product. The writer also tends to identify the African person as an epic figure through several characteristics that distinguish the epic hero as an archetypal character. In *Things fall apart*, Okonkwo is portrayed at the beginning of the novel as a representative of his community and a leader of Umuofia. For him, the hero should be thirst for action, possess a noble status, be a great man, a leader, and so on. These qualities are all resemble to Achebe's hero where, greatness and nobility are achieved through successive efforts and hard work.

### **Lukács' and Bakhtin's Marxist approaches**

The third approach that we adopted in order to show and justify the situation Okonkwo experienced at the middle of the novel is Lukács's and Bakhtin's Marxist approaches, where class struggle, the impact of colonialism, the clash between the traditional African society and European imperialism, and the exploitation of the indigenous population by colonial powers for economic interest are clearly evident in this novel. Okonkwo lived in an alienated state after his exile, where he encounters an alternative social and religious system and a rigid psychological disorder that

severely affected his life. Lukács' *Theory of the novel* is a suitable and fundamental description to Okonkwo's state of instability and the class struggle that Igbo society faced after the colonial expansion. In addition to that of Bakhtin where Achebe explores the clash between Igbo tradition and colonialism, reflecting the Marxist idea of social conflict between dominant and subordinate groups 'The master and the slave'. His dialogism and heteroglossia can be exhibited in the novel's portrayal of multiple voices and perspectives, focusing on the complexity of the cultural encounter. Moreover, his notion of carnivalesque resonates with Achebe's depiction of Igbo society experiencing transformation in the face of colonialism.

### **Aristotelian Poetics**

At the end of the novel, and by the developing events which led the protagonist to commit suicide transform the novel into a tragic piece, prompting us to adopt the Aristotelian theory of tragedy. In his *Poetics* (1996), he involves several aspects such as imitation, pity and fear, *katharsis*, 'harmatia' and the primacy of the plot. These elements are adapted and very apparent in Achebe's novel through the character of Okonkwo. The first aspect deals with tragedy as an imitation of an action of life that is serious, admirable; complete that possesses magnitude, which is the essence of tragedy according to Aristotle. The second aspect involves 'pity and fear' these two concepts are important; the rise of these feelings in the audience's is needed, along with experiencing their pleasurable relief through 'katharsis'. Moreover, the concept of 'harmatia' is viewed by Aristotle as "is referring exclusively to intellectual errors \_ to ignorance and mistakes of fact" (Aristotle, 1996, p. xxxii). The primacy of plot is well emphasized by our philosopher where it contains some basic concepts such as: completeness, magnitude, unity, determinate structure and universality.

### III. Results and Discussion

Following the approach defined in the above eclectic methodology, we have reached several results:

The author uses a storytelling technique skillfully where he filled the novel with proverbs especially at the beginning of the story. Through his engaging narrative style which blends elements of oral tradition with literary techniques, he skilled in captivating the audience which led to be considered as an orator or a 'griot'.

The dominance of the theme of 'return' in the story, this concept contributed seriously in the displacement of the hero to his downfall as a tragic figure.

The author selected a mode of writing that is suitable to the events of the novel which is critical realism despite the novel is a modernist one in order to arrive and capture the heart of the reader and that the latter incarnates the world of the story.

Three faces of the hero have been involved in this master piece. The first face that we can see right at the start of the novel is that of the epic hero. The hero stands above the other members of his community in terms of physical stature and accomplishments. The second face is that of the middle of the novel which is the problematic hero where the hero became an alienated character after his exile when he found his society is no longer the same. The third face is that of the tragic figure. At the end of the novel, the protagonist fell under hard circumstances and strict psychological disorder in an eventual collapse where he committed suicide in an ambiguous state.

In order to explore universal themes and give cultural deepness to his narrative, Achebe has used the mythic method. By this method, he succeeded to enrich the reader's understanding of the characters and their world by weaving Igbo myths, folklore and traditions and helped to connect the author's storytelling with broader human experiences and truths.

In *Things fall apart*, Okonkwo can be seen as embodying aspects of hero-worship, he idolizes his father's antithesis seeking to be everything his father was not. His pursuit of strength,

masculinity and success is driven by his desire to fulfill his cultural ideals of heroism and avoid the perceived weaknesses of his father. By his achievements and heroic deeds, he became a true hero in the eyes of his people.

The images of the hero come into condensation marked by displacement in accordance to Frye's *Anatomy of criticism*. The protagonist is seen as an archetypal hero embodying traits like strength, determination and the desire for success. He experienced a journey from a noble status to strict internal and external conflicts which ultimately led to a tragic downfall which is a common theme in the hero archetypal approach.

Critics involved on the issue of suicide of the protagonist by Frazer in the light of Durkheim's suicide theory, concluding Okonkwo's suicide as anomic one.

Counter arguments dealing with the hero's suicide to be a tragic figure illustrated by Achebe's writings of the novel and the hidden truths and information that reside behind the lines and the details.

The presentation of the foil characters between Obierika as the foil of Okonkwo and Ikemefuna as the foil of Nyowe.

The prominence of the novel and its consideration as a monument under the celebration of the African character, culture and their dimensions. This title given to this masterpiece helped greatly in regaining the African dignity and sharing a status in the post-colonial memory.

At the end, Obierika is the intellectual hero that the Igbo land needs referring to Fanon's *The wretched of the earth* where he gives importance to the intellectual and to the collective power as well, to rise a community and succeed in its leadership. Obierika is embodied as an intellectual who knows how to manage with community, economic and political matters and who helped greatly in restoring the African character and personality in terms of culture, traditions, customs and civilization.

What follows is a discussion of the image of the hero in the African masterpiece *Things fall apart* by Chinua Achebe (1986). Through an analysis of the novel, we observe a continuous evolution of the protagonist. It portrays the life and culture of African people before and during colonization. This period witnessed a deep disruption and crisis in the African traditional way of life and culture in general, and in the people's psychology in particular. The hero in the novel undergoes a progressive development, experiencing a changing atmosphere from his youth to his death, influenced by the arrival of the white man and their struggle for power and control over Igbo society.

In the beginning, Okonkwo is portrayed as an epic figure, a leader of his tribe, a famous wrestler, and a self-made man. However, as the events of the story unfold, Okonkwo becomes a problematic figure, alienated in a society that no longer exists as he remembers. In the end, Okonkwo falls tragically under difficult circumstances, committing suicide and becoming a tragic figure.

### **III. 1. Okonkwo as epic hero**

This section is devoted to studying the first phase, which is the depiction of the hero as epic. The protagonist resembles many heroes from various stories found in different cultures, including Greek mythology. However, in doing so, we must avoid presenting a singular, unified portrait of this heroic character.

Before delving deeper into the epic figure, we will offer some notes on the author and the structure he followed to convey his message to the reader and audience. Achebe showcases his prowess and skills as an epic orator, and more precisely, he is described as a *griot* through his masterful use of language and storytelling techniques. Through the character of Okonkwo and the portrayal of Igbo culture, he constructs a narrative that addresses universal themes such as the clash of cultures, the consequences of colonialism, and the complexities of human nature. Achebe

employs vivid imagery to capture the essence of Igbo culture and the impact of colonialism, through detailed descriptions of the African landscape and precise portrayals of traditional ceremonies and rituals. He depicts pre-colonial Nigeria through his description of the village of Umuofia, with its red earth and towering palm trees, allowing the reader to immerse themselves in the story and connect with the lives and personalities of the characters. Additionally, the writer uses evocative language to create a powerful and immersive narrative experience. For instance, when describing the rhythmic beats of the drums during communal gatherings, Achebe writes: “Okonkwo had just blown out the palm-oil lamp and stretched himself on his bamboo bed when he heard the *ogene* of the town-crier piercing the still night air. Gome, gome, gome, gome, boomed the hollow metal” (p. 7). Furthermore, Achebe reinforces his narrative by using traditional Igbo proverbs, especially in the first part of the novel, to convey cultural wisdom and highlight the richness of Igbo oral tradition. For example, Unoka says: “Our elders say that the sun will shine on those who stand before it shines on those who kneel under them” (p. 6). This proverb means that it is important for someone to rely on themselves and take proactive action to reap the benefits or rewards before those who passively submit to others or wait for assistance.

As mentioned at the beginning, the hero experienced a kind of evolution in his life due to the changes he encountered throughout his career. The colonial expansion in his land shook his inner stability after his return from exile, which was imposed on him by the elders of the Igbo tribe after he inadvertently killed Ezeudu Ogbuefi’s son. This situation introduces the theme of ‘the return’ in the novel, which is clearly reflected in the character of Okonkwo. Upon his return to his tribe, Okonkwo finds that everything has changed in his society; the old values and virtues he left behind no longer exist. The arrival of the white man led to a significant transformation and disintegration of Igbo traditions and customs, which profoundly affected Okonkwo's psychological stability. He felt like a stranger in his own land, leading him to live in immense solitude, full of inner turmoil and disorder. This alienation distanced him from his community, turning him into a solitary man—no

longer at ease. Okonkwo's situation resembles that of the Magi in Eliot's *Journey of the Magi* in Roberts' *The faber book of modern verse* (1936).

But had thought they were different; this birth was  
Hard and bitter agony for us, like death, our death.  
We returned to our places, these Kingdoms,  
But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation,  
With an alien people clutching their gods.  
Should be glad of another death. (p. 105)

This is the last stanza of the poem where Eliot describes the Magi's situation after their return to their 'Kingdoms.' They are no longer at ease; they find that everything has changed, and the man does not feel comfortable there, to the point where he would be glad to die once more. Such a state, inevitably, leads to a tragic end, and this is exactly what happens to Okonkwo. His excessive resistance to colonial change, his overconfidence in restoring the old order and regime, and his strong rejection of being ruled by the white man all lead to his eventual downfall, which will be discussed in the third part of this section.

The novel is an example of critical realism, a literary movement that emerged between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It sought to depict life as it truly is, focusing on the struggles of ordinary people and the harsh realities of society, much like the works of Honoré de Balzac, who emphasized detailed observations of social structure, economic and cultural realities, the complexities of human psychology, social critique, and the interconnectedness of characters and events, relying on the unity of time, place, and action. This approach is adopted by Chinua Achebe in his novel, where he draws upon elements of realism similar to Balzac's. He uses a linear sequence, presenting events in chronological order. According to Balzac, the central category and criterion of realist literature is the "type"—a peculiar synthesis that organically binds together the

general and the particular in both characters and situations (Lukács, 1972a, p. 6). For him, true great realism depicts man and society as complete entities (Lukács, 1972b, p. 6).

Great authors create characters who act independently in their lives, where the decisions of their society hold value for the individual. Lukács, in his *Studies in European realism* (1972), wrote: “The characters created by the great realists, once conceived in the vision of their creator, live an independent life of their own: their coming and going, their development, their destiny is dictated by the inner dialectic of their social and individual existence” (p. 11). He added: “The Balzac characters, complete within themselves, live and act within a concrete, complexly stratified social reality, and it is always the totality of the social process that is linked with the totality of the character” (p. 55).

In *Things fall apart*, Chinua Achebe seeks to preserve and celebrate the African character, especially the notion of heroism, in response to the negative portrayal in imperial literature. He displays the protagonist in the first part of the novel as an epic hero. The latter possesses several characteristics that reflect the value and nature of the African character. The epic hero must deal with totality, have a noble career, be self-made, and be well-known and preeminent within his community. He is a wrestler, a leader, and a representative of his tribe, brave, strong, and driven by the desire for success and honor. Additionally, the hero embodies qualities such as self-love, mental strength, supernatural elements, self-confidence, and more.

According to Lukács, understanding society requires grasping it as a totality, where individual elements are not isolated entities but are interconnected and influenced by the whole. Thus, it is important to consider social, economic, political, and cultural aspects as interconnected and inseparable elements. Lukács emphasizes the need to analyze social phenomena according to their historical contexts, economic structures, class relations, and cultural manifestations. He argued: “The novel is the epic of an age in which the extensive totality of life is no longer directly given, in

which the immanence of meaning in life has become a problem, yet which still thinks in terms of totality” (p. 56). For Lukács, the focus is on analyzing social phenomena through the lens of their historical contexts, economic structures, class relations, and cultural expressions. In *Things Fall Apart*, the hero is engaged in a state that involves the well-being of his society. Okpewho (1975) stated that “despite the care the hero takes to place himself above the rank and file of society, he is very much a communal man, and he reflects the cosmic interests of his community” (pp. 125-6).

In *Things fall apart*, the idea of totality is pervasive; it reflects the interconnectedness of various aspects of life in Igbo society, from social structure to religious beliefs, all forming a cohesive whole. Through his novel, Achebe highlights the fragility of social harmony and the importance of maintaining balance and coherence within the community. One of the main characteristics of the epic hero is to rise above his society and address all matters concerning his community as a unified body. As Lukács wrote: “The epic hero, strictly speaking, is never an individual. It is traditionally thought that one of the essential characteristics of the epic is the fact that its theme is not a personal destiny but the destiny of a community” (p. 66). In this context, Achebe’s hero embodies many aspects of a communal man, particularly in his adherence to traditional Igbo values and customs and his commitment to the well-being of his clan.

Okonkwo actively participates in communal activities such as festivals and meetings, and he feels proud of his role as a leader within his community. He values the collective wisdom of his people, seeking guidance from elders and participating in decision-making processes that affect the entire community. The protagonist is portrayed in the novel as the representative of his clan and the leader of Umuofia’s wars, chosen by the elders of the clan. This idea is illustrated in the line: “And so when Okonkwo of Umuofia arrived at Mbaino as the proud and imperious emissary of war” (p. 9). According to Okpewho (1975), the traditional hero is often either a leader of his group or one destined to lead it shortly (p. 95). This position aligns with the mental strength that the heroic figure

must possess to lead the community and be a significant element within it, thereby reflecting the African people, traditions, and culture. Okonkwo's mental power significantly impacts his leadership and status among the Umuofia tribe. He represents his community and its people, always striving to improve his clan's way of life. His mental strength allows him to navigate all matters concerning his tribe effectively. As Okpewho observed:

In many cases, the heroic tale portrays the hero as living in a society with a certain amount of organization, actively engaged in a case involving the fundamental well-being of his community. It is therefore no surprise to find him demonstrating a certain concern for justice and decorum. (p. 123)

The career of Okonkwo is marked by all the elements mentioned here. Achebe skillfully depicts his hero as a man of justice and a man of his community, as Okonkwo follows the rules set by his culture and enforces them rigorously, especially when it comes to maintaining order and discipline within his family and clan.

Proverbs serve as a means of communication, offering guidance, moral lessons, and insights into the values upheld by the community. At the beginning of the novel, before the arrival of the white man, the narrative is characterized by the intensive use of proverbs, which are considered the "art of conversation," the power of words, and the soul of Igbo society and its culture. The author explains: "and proverbs are the palm-oil with which words are eaten" (p. 5). This illustrates how this society preserves its traditions and customs, which are core to their community. Through the use of proverbs, Achebe showcases the richness of the Igbo oral tradition and demonstrates how these sayings shape the characters' beliefs and actions. When Okonkwo sat with Nwakibie, a wealthy man in his village, to ask for a favor, he said: "As our people say, a man who pays respect to the great paves the way for his own greatness" (p. 14). Additionally, when Okonkwo asked Nwakibie for help, he remarked: "The lizard that jumped from the high iroko tree to the ground said he would praise himself if no one else did" (pp. 15-16).

Okonkwo is a well-known figure in his clan and throughout the nine villages. He is recognized for his physical prowess and bravery. His fame stems from his numerous personal achievements, victories, and great deeds, embodying the ideal of masculinity in his culture. Okpewho (1975) observed that “The growth and development of the epic hero is also generally extraordinary. He would hardly be a fit subject for glorification if the progress of his career were no different from the norm” (p. 89). Masculinity plays a prominent role in Igbo society, where physical appearance significantly impacts the hero’s egocentric personality. Okpewho noted, “Perhaps the most noticeable feature of the hero’s image is his preeminence among his fellows” (p. 94). This argument is reinforced by Achebe’s description: “He was tall and huge, and his bushy eyebrows and wide nose gave him a very severe look. He breathed heavily [...] when he walked, his heels hardly touched the ground, and he seemed to walk on springs” (p. 3). The author glorifies his hero by giving him a distinguished appearance, making him respected, authoritative, and feared by those who do not admire him. Another aspect that contributes to Okonkwo’s greatness is the dominance of the patriarchal system that characterizes Igbo society. He consistently imposes his orders on his wives and children, forcing them to obey him strictly. This is evident when his youngest wife goes to plait her hair at her friend’s house during the Week of Peace and does not return early enough to cook the afternoon meal. Upon her return, he beats her severely, forgetting that he is in a sacred week and will be punished by Eseani, the priest of the earth goddess.

The protagonist is a wealthy farmer who has three wives and has taken two titles. Even though he is young, he is one of the greatest men of his time. Through his successive victories, his fame has grown rapidly, making him a towering figure. The author wrote: “As the elders said, if a child washed his hands he could eat with kings. Okonkwo had clearly washed his hands, and so he ate with kings and elders” (p. 6). This means that Okonkwo has worked very hard, with great determination, always striving to be successful and respected in his community. Despite the

numerous challenges and difficulties he faces, he continually seeks to persist in order to achieve greatness and a high position. Okpewho (1975) argued:

Often, too, there is something in the birth and early youth of the hero that sets him apart from the natural course of life and inspires awe and veneration. In the African myth, it is indeed at this stage of the hero's life that the foundations of his formidable career are laid. (p. 86)

He stated that in Africa, the heroic career starts right from infancy (Okpewho, 1975, p. 89). Like Okonkwo, who, at the age of eighteen, managed to cut off the head of a human being and defeat 'Amalinze the Cat,' the greatest wrestler among all the villages. Achebe wrote: "As a young man of eighteen, he had brought honor to his village by throwing Amalinze the Cat. Amalinze was the great wrestler who for seven years was unbeaten, from Umuofia to Mbaino" (p. 3). This was considered the fiercest fight the tribe had ever witnessed. This demonstrates that Okonkwo's growth and development from childhood are glorified. All these achievements allowed him to become a well-known figure throughout the villages and beyond.

Throughout the novel, we notice that Okonkwo is portrayed as a determined and ambitious young man, driven by the desire to overcome his father's legacy of weakness and failure. He strives to achieve a noble status, far from the misfortunes and misbehavior of his father, Unoka. The author wrote: "Unoka, for that was his father's name, had died ten years ago. In his day, he was lazy and improvident and quite incapable of thinking about tomorrow" (p. 3). This illustrates the character of Okonkwo's father. However, through intensive work and ambition, Okonkwo managed to build himself up, develop his wealth, and gain respect in his community. He became a farmer, a warrior, and a leader. Building wealth and power is not easy, especially with a father like Unoka. Okonkwo, as his son, began his career with hard work, self-reliance, and perseverance, distancing himself from his father's reputation for weakness and failure. He tends to be independent, refusing to accept help from others, and relies solely on his own efforts to achieve success. Okonkwo is considered the archetype of the self-made man due to his greed and ambition to attain greatness and respect from

the tribe. Unlike many other young men, Okonkwo did not inherit any wealth from his father. He did not possess barns, a title, or even a young wife, as the author notes: “With a father like Unoka, Okonkwo did not have the start in life that many young men had. He neither inherited a barn nor a title, nor even a young wife” (p. 13). His beginnings were poorer than those of others. His father consulted the Oracle of the Hills and the Caves to find out the causes behind his miserable harvest, due to his laziness and lack of responsibility. The writer describes Okonkwo’s will and drive to improve his conditions and position when he asked Nwakibie to lend him some yams, saying:

I have cleared a farm but have no yams to sow. I know what it is to ask a man to trust another with his yams, especially these days when young men are afraid of hard work [...] I began to fend for myself at an age when most people still stuck at their mother’s breast. If you give me some yam seeds I shall not fail you. (p. 6)

Nwakibie replied, “It pleases me to see a young man like you these days when our youth have gone so soft” (p. 16). By praising Okonkwo, Nwakibie highlights his value and the kind of youth the clan needs.

We can see Okonkwo’s intensive and successive work when he planted the yams in the year he took eight hundred seed yams from Nwakibie. It was the hardest and worst year Okonkwo had ever faced. The climate was completely against the farmer’s needs and hopes. At first, it was dry and scorching, causing all of Okonkwo’s yams to be killed and burned by the heat. Then, after a second attempt at planting, there was an unprecedented downpour, and the sun did not appear for a long time; without it, the tubers would not grow. The harvest that year was like a “funeral,” as Achebe wrote (p. 17). It was a year no one could forget, and he was always proud of himself for not succumbing to despair. The author noted: “he knew he was a fierce fighter, but that year had been enough to break the heart of a lion.” He added, “since I survived that year,” he always said, “I shall survive anything” (p. 18). He attributed his resilience to “his inflexible will,” which indicates his inherent drive to work hard—an inner trait. Even his father acknowledged that he knew Okonkwo

would not despair, recognizing that he possessed a manly and proud heart capable of surviving great failures.

Okonkwo as a great wrestler as considered in the novel is a central aspect Achebe used which characterizes the epic. As Okpewho (1975) declared: “but these later contests are introduced in a manner that emphasizes the hero’s restless thirst for action” (p. 102). So, the protagonist doesn’t know fear for wrestling, he is always ready and eager for fight. To be a wrestler means to have a great strength, determination and desire for gaining recognition, esteem, respect and status in community. He also considers being a wrestler as an opportunity to prove himself and transgress his father’s reputation as a failure. His status as a wrestler becomes a figure of inspiration for the Igbo’s younger generations serving as an inspiring hero in his village. Wrestling in Igbo culture is not just a physical contest but also a reflection of cultural values of this society. He is a man of action; he doesn’t know fear and is never afraid of wars. Unlike his father Unoka who is a lazy, improvident and a homofestivus man, he is a strong and brave person who could stand bloody wars that in the last Umuofia war he was the first to bring a human head at home and was his fifth one. The writer said: “Unlike his father, he could stand the look of blood. In Umuofia’s latest war he was the first to bring home a human head. That was his fifth head” (pp. 7-8). He had gained the title of the great wrestler of his village at a very early age. Umuofia was famous of its harshness and its strong wrestlers in wars and battles that all the nine villages fear to confront it. This can be seen when the wife of Ogbuefi Udo had been murdered by a member of the village of Mbaino and when the tribe’s elders decided to avenge, the other clan sought to settle the problem by providing Okonkwo with a lad of fifteen years old and a young virgin as recompense. This means that Okonkwo Another example of Okonkwo’s triumph is wrestling in the Olympic Games. The illustration depicts a field surrounded by a circle of sand, shaping the traditional wrestling grounds in Umuofia. Okonkwo, with his strong body glistening with oil, wears a loincloth decorated with intricate patterns symbolizing his cultural heritage. His eyes are intensely focused on his opponent, a strong wrestler

from another land who stands opposite him. The judges and clan members watch, raising cheers as the wrestlers begin their fierce battle. Okonkwo uses the great techniques he has gained through years of wrestling in his village, proving formidable against his opponent. Despite the latter's strength, Okonkwo remains resilient, drawing upon the unbreakable spirit of his ancestors. With a powerful surge of strength, he pins his adversary to the ground in a triumphant display of victory, his arms raised in celebration among the crowd, showcasing the resilience and strength of his people.

Okonkwo upholds traditional Igbo customs and values by actively participating in tribal rituals and ceremonies, such as the annual wrestling matches organized by the clan and the feast of the New Yam. These events are significant for Igbo culture and symbolize the community's connection to its traditions and ancestors. He also makes sacrifices to his ancestors and seeks their guidance during times of difficulty or decision-making. For instance, when a member of Mbaino killed Ogbuefi Udo's wife, Okonkwo consulted the Oracle of the Hills and the Caves to decide whether to go to war with the clan. This can also be seen as a supernatural element, where he appeals to the superior aid of his "chi"; when his chi says yes, he automatically agrees. He also owns a small house, referred to as the 'medicine house,' where Okonkwo keeps wooden symbols of his personal god and ancestral spirits. Achebe wrote: "he worshiped them with sacrifices of kola nuts, food, and palm-wine, and offered prayers to them on behalf of himself, his three wives, and eight children" (p. 10). Okonkwo respects the authority of his tribal leaders and elders, such as the village council, always following their decisions and obeying the rules and customs concerning his community.

The protagonist's self-confidence and love of danger are clearly shown when the author states: "And so when Okonkwo of Umuofia arrived at Mbaino as the proud and imperious emissary of war, he was treated with great honor and respect, and two days later he returned home with a lad of fifteen and a young virgin" (p. 9). Okonkwo demonstrates extreme confidence in his own abilities,

which leads him to get what he wants easily and to resolve his situations in a straightforward manner.

To sum up, it can be said that Okpewho successfully appropriates Frye's conception of writing modes and the hero through his masterful description of Igbo society and traditions, portraying the protagonist as an archetypal hero. The hero in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* embodies all the essential features of an epic hero. Okonkwo represents the highest ideals upon which society relies for a better life and security, acting as the leader of his community. Epic heroes illustrate that a man who stands for his clan can overcome the challenges his people face, and Okonkwo stands above others in this regard.

The novel's hero rises from humble beginnings to become a respected figure in the village. He tirelessly works to surpass his father's legacy of weakness and irresponsibility. Early on, Okonkwo earns the title of the greatest wrestler across the villages through a mythic feat, throwing Amalinze the Cat. As is well-known, success does not come easily; one must fight to achieve their goals. This is precisely what Okonkwo does, exerting tremendous effort to attain his status. Anyone familiar with his journey and struggles against poverty would not call him a lucky man; rather, it is clear that he fought to secure his position. For this reason, he is chosen by the nine villages to carry a message of war to their enemies unless they agree to provide a young man and a virgin as recompense for the murder of Udo's wife. He thus becomes their representative.

Indeed, many writers attempt to create characters who are extraordinary individuals, often elevating them to heroic status. These heroes are typically strong and have connections to gods and ancestors. This notion is striking in *Things fall apart*. Britwum, in her *Hero-worship in the African Novel* (1975), observes, "the cult of the outstanding individual, of the uncommon mortals that runs through them" (p. 13). Igbokwe, in his *A Journal of Igbo Art and Culture* (2011), describes hero-worship as "great admiration for somebody because you think they are extremely beautiful,

intelligent, etc.; hero-worship is the worship or adoration of heroes” (p. 14). Okonkwo is not seen as an ordinary man; he is regarded as a supreme figure whose desire to resist British colonialism and Christian missionaries remains strong. His determination to be the antithesis of his father, along with his pursuit of power, strength, and success—values highly esteemed in his community—earns him the respect and admiration of his people, solidifying his status as a hero.

The displacement of the protagonist in Achebe’s *Things fall apart* encapsulates the mythical structure within the realistic mode employed by the author to illustrate the archetypal hero. Archetypes represent repeated patterns of common human experiences and play a central role in dreams, myths, legends, and various literary works, stemming from our collective unconscious. They reflect the joys, desires, and deepest fears of universal humanity rather than those of a single individual. Frye, in his *Anatomy of criticism*, argues that “the presence of mythical structure in realistic fiction poses certain technical problems for making it plausible, and the devices used in solving these problems may be given the general name of displacement” (p. 136). For Frye, the development of the hero's character and situation is vital for achieving a realistic mode and establishing the protagonist as an archetypal hero.

The rapid rise of the hero to power and prominence is a common characteristic of archetypes. According to Frye, the hero must embark on a life journey, starting from a position of power and prestige, choosing a course of action, possessing a tragic flaw, and gaining awareness of circumstances that lead to his downfall. Like Okonkwo, whose life is a journey, he begins as a noble leader and representative of his tribe. However, after inadvertently killing a clansman, he is exiled to his mother’s land for seven years. Upon his return, he discovers that everything has changed due to European intrusion and the arrival of Christian missionaries. Ultimately, upon realizing that his people can no longer unite against colonial powers, he takes his own life.

#### IV. 2. Okonkwo as problematic hero

As we go through the novel's narrative structure, we notice a dramatic twist and a shift in the nature of the protagonist's character, from a man of heroic deeds to a problematic figure due to psychological conflicts, where the character's development is more psychological than physical. In the second part of the novel, there is an emphasis on individuality, everyone is free, independent, and self-reliant. The idea of totality, which was dominant in the first part of the novel, is no longer as strong; its sense weakens and begins to disappear among the people of Umuofia. This results from the disorder, dissolution, and decline of the old traditional customs in which Igbo society was rooted. Everything starts to fall apart during Okonkwo's exile. The white man begins to invade the villages one by one, their missionaries spread throughout Igbo society, and they start to influence the people, dragging many, including Okonkwo's son Nwoye, to their side. Nwoye's defection contributes significantly to his father's anxiety, which greatly affects Okonkwo's psychological state, leading to his sense of alienation. As Lukács argues in *Theory of the novel* (1971): "This loneliness is not only dramatic but also psychological, because it is not merely the a priori property of all dramatis personae but also the lived experience of a man in the process of becoming a hero" (p. 46).

Through reading the novel, we notice an apparent shift in the narrative structure. At the beginning, it is about life in Igbo society, its beauty, traditions, and customs. The reader inhabits the life situation of this society, where the writer skillfully engages the reader's mind by depicting the diversity of Igbo culture and using the oral tradition of storytelling through proverbs, which are considered "the palm-oil with which words are eaten." However, as the story progresses and the Europeans arrive, the language used diverges significantly from that of the first part. Proverbs have completely disappeared from the novel, and Igbo culture, traditions, and values are no longer what they once were. This change is due to the influence of colonization on society in general and on the

people's psychology in particular. The psychological turmoil faced by the characters has even affected the narrative structure that the author employs.

The fear in Okonkwo is very apparent from the beginning of the novel, and it is the main reason that led him to succeed in his career and become one of the greatest men in the tribe. His fear was the fear of weakness; he feared being like his father, Unoka, who was weak, lazy, and irresponsible. Okonkwo worked hard to surpass his father and erase his bad reputation. At first, he succeeded in shaping his career and position, but later, this fear began to negatively affect his inner life, leading him to commit excessively harsh and rigid actions. For instance, Ikemefuna, the lad of fifteen whom he brought from Mbaino as compensation, called Okonkwo 'father,' and Okonkwo grew fond of him. However, when the Oracle of the Hills and the Caves decreed that the boy must be killed, Ogbuefi Ezeudu, one of the elders of Umuofia, advised Okonkwo not to participate in the boy's death because Ikemefuna considered him a father. Yet Okonkwo's fear of weakness compelled him to kill the boy, which caused significant inner turmoil in his life. The author wrote: "Okonkwo did not taste any food for two days after the death of Ikemefuna. He drank palm-wine from morning till night, and his eyes were red and fierce like the eyes of a rat" (p. 44). Additionally, his regret over killing Ikemefuna was so great that the writer said: "He did not sleep at night. He tried not to think about Ikemefuna, but the more he tried, the more he thought about him. Once, he got up from bed and walked about his compound" (p. 44). This shows that he experienced a severe psychological disturbance during that period. He made this decision, which was against the elders' advice, to fulfill his impulsive behavior, and this action truly haunted him and made him feel guilty. His fear can also be seen in how he treats his family. Okonkwo is always imposing his masculinity and strength on his family members. His wives and children constantly live in fear and turmoil in their huts due to Okonkwo's harshness and rigidity. One of his wives was beaten during the Week of Peace, even though he knew it was forbidden to transgress such rituals. He did this because of his adherence to gender roles and the dominance of the patriarchal

system in Igbo society. Thus, the notion of fear is present and dominant throughout the novel, leading to a deep psychological disorder and rigid anxiety within the protagonist, who experiences a troubled state throughout the progression of the novel.

Another characteristic of the hero that leads him to live in a state of inner unrest, disruption, and perturbation is his arrogance. This arrogance stems from his fears: the fear of being judged by his society, the fear of the past and his father's reputation, and the fear of showing weakness. Okonkwo feels superior because of his position as a representative of his clan, his strength and power, his greatness in his tribe, and his wealth and noble status that allow him to sit with the elders, the '*egwugwu*.' Even though he borrowed yams from Nwakibie to start his career and grow his wealth, he harbors excessive pride and always considers himself more superior to others, trying to forget where he started. He does not recognize the contributions of other people to his greatness. As Achebe wrote:

I have come to you for help, he said, Perhaps you can already guess what it is. I have cleared a farm but have no yams to sow. I know what it is to ask a man to trust another with his yams, especially these days when young men are afraid of work. The lizard that jumped from the high iroko tree to the ground said he would praise himself if no one else did. I began to fend for myself at an age when most people still stuck at their mother's breasts. If you give me some yam seeds I shall not fail you. (pp. 15-6)

He shows his arrogance even when he asks for help and borrows the yam seeds; he praises himself to Nwakibie and feels pride of his character being strong and willing for hard work.

During his period of exile, Okonkwo received Obierika twice. The first time, Obierika told him about the initial arrival of the white man and their expansion through the villages, and how the village of Abame had been wiped out by the killing of its people by the white men. In this instance, Okonkwo felt anxious and worried. He said: "They were fools." And he added: "They had been warned that danger was ahead. They should have armed themselves with their guns and their machetes even when they went to market" (p. 99). The author shows the protagonist's anger, fear, and anxiety about the villages far from them. Okonkwo was eager to return to his homeland in

order to resume his career and continue his ambitions, which had been interrupted by his exile. However, after his return, he finds that everything has changed—nothing is as it was before. Lukács stated: “The epic individual, the hero of the novel, is the product of estrangement from the outside world” (p. 66). Okonkwo finds himself a stranger in his own land because of the transformed society. He discovers that Umuofia has drastically changed due to the arrival and influence of the European missionaries and colonial administrators. These intrusive colonial forces have profoundly altered the societal structure, cultural practices, and traditions of his community. The missionaries have successfully established a church in Umuofia, attracting many converts from the village, including some of Okonkwo’s kin. These converts, who are primarily those marginalized in traditional Igbo society, found new protection and prestige under the missionaries. The church also challenged the established social order, creating a division between the converts and those who adhered to the traditional Igbo way of life. Additionally, the British colonial government had asserted control over the region, introducing a new system of administration that undermined the traditional authority of the clan’s elders and leaders. In *The Theory of the Novel* (1971), Lukács wrote:

Loneliness has to become a problem unto itself, deepening and confusing the tragic problem and ultimately taking its place. Such loneliness is not simply the intoxication of the soul gripped by destiny and so made song; it is also the torment of a creature condemned to solitude and devoured by a longing for community. (p. 45)

This is well illustrated in Okonkwo, who tends to restore what the white men destroyed in his society. He is eager for a united community, as it was before. Okonkwo is devastated and destroyed by these changes. He realizes that his ambitions for personal glory and the restoration of his status are now out of reach in his altered society. The achievements and values that defined his identity and success before are no longer recognized or respected in the same way. His reaction to these changes is one of anger and frustration. He attempts to gather the people of his clan in order to resist the colonial presence, but he finds limited support from them. The division within the community makes resistance difficult. These conditions drive him to neglect the previous totality

that was dominant at the beginning of the novel. A harsh alienation and isolation are imposed on Okonkwo, where he finds himself a stranger in his own community, which greatly affects his inner state, disrupts his psychological stability, and creates a long distance between him and his community. That is what Lukács explains:

Neither can a totality of life which is by definition extensive be achieved by the object's being annihilated\_\_by the subject's making itself the sole ruler of existence. However high the subject may rise above its objects and take them into its sovereign possession, they are still and always only isolated objects, whose sum never equals a real totality (p. 53).

And the second time Obierika visited was when he learned that Nyowe was with the white men's missionaries, where he found his friend completely devastated by what his son had done. Nyowe's conversion to Christianity and his decision to join the missionaries represent pivotal moments that deeply impact his father. Nyowe's conversion comes as a response to the rigid and violent nature of traditional Igbo expectations of masculinity. He is sensitive and less aggressive; therefore, he finds that the missionaries and Christianity, which offer him an alternative moral framework and a sense of peace, suit him better than the Igbo traditional system, which lacks such features. Nyowe's adoption of Christianity and his joining the missionaries signify a profound betrayal to Okonkwo, symbolizing a loss of a son in several ways. Firstly, it represents a personal failure for him in his inability to raise his son according to Igbo traditions and ideals of masculinity. Secondly, Nyowe's rejection of traditional customs signifies weakness and failure in the eyes of his father, both regarding Nyowe as a son and Okonkwo as a father. Furthermore, Nyowe's conversion seems to symbolize the disintegration of Igbo society and the loss of traditional values in the face of colonial influence. Okonkwo describes this as a threat not just to his way of life but also to the survival of their culture and traditions. These changes introduce a new political and social system that undermines the social cohesion of the Igbo community, leading to its eventual fragmentation. Nyowe's decision contributes to the anxiety and alienation of his father due to his inability to adapt to the changing world.

As a whole, the psychological struggles that Okonkwo experiences throughout the development of the novel are due to his dominant fear of weakness, which is one of the major reasons for his inner conflicts. His apparent arrogance, the colonial invasion by Europeans and their missionaries, and his son's conversion to Christianity all play pivotal roles in transforming Okonkwo into an alienated and estranged character filled with frustration and discontent. These conditions are very difficult for a protagonist like Okonkwo to face; he is a hero who lived in a community known for its pure and glorious past, rich in various cultures, customs, traditions, and rituals. It is tragic for a community characterized by unity to be destroyed and fragmented under the influence of colonialism, which has created social divisions and class struggles among Umuofia's people. It is equally tragic for an epic hero to degenerate from a noble status and successful career to a situation filled with disruption and disorder, becoming distanced from his community after a glorious past marked by a strong connection with it.

However, Bloom's opinion centers on the idea that Okonkwo is the epitome of heroism in Igbo culture and society. The hero's character is seen as a true representation of the complexities that characterize Igbo society and as "the personification of their cultural ambiguity" (Bloom, 2010, p. 41). After the intrusion and domination of the white regime, things fell apart; their heroes became disabled, and the community's customs and culture disintegrated under the total domination of the colonizers. These harsh conditions placed the protagonist in a serious crisis that led him to take his own life. Bloom clarifies this idea through Obierika's speech to the commissioner, telling him: "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" (p. 147). He supports his argument by claiming that this act reflects the Igbo system and culture, emphasizing that the hero is the "product of the social matrix within which he operates" (Bloom, 2010, p. 41). Okonkwo cannot find equilibrium between his community's social norms and his personal ideals; thus, it is not surprising that he commits this act.

Begam, in his essay “*Achebe’s Sense of an Ending: History and Tragedy in Things Fall Apart*” (1997), describes the novel as a nationalist history attempting to reconstruct and recover the Igbo past by writing an adversarial history against what Achebe called the ‘colonialist’ discourse. Begam insists on the association of national history with classical or Aristotelian tragedy. Thus, the hero is undoubtedly a flawed character, guilty of errors in judgment; these features allow us to use the Greek term ‘*hamartia*.’ For him, the protagonist’s suicide is seen as the logical and necessary consequence of an idealistic and absolutist position (p. 401). It is a heroic action that supports the idea that the Igbo people honor their cultural heritage by refusing assimilation.

In addition to Granqvist’s perspective, in his *Swedish Reviews of Chinua Achebe’s Things Fall Apart and A Man of the People* (1984), he explores how Achebe tends to highlight the destructive effects of colonialism on traditional Igbo society and their struggle to restore their cultural identity through the character of Okonkwo, who fights against social and cultural changes in order to resist the colonial regime imposed on his people. Granqvist points out that Swedish viewers see Achebe’s focus on the dialectics of Igbo society, its strength, and its vulnerability (p. 396). In other words, Achebe is writing about Africa. He appreciates Achebe’s depiction of African society, presenting an authentic portrayal of African traditions, social structures, and the impact of colonialism. Overall, Granqvist views the decline of Africa as an evolutionary one, according to historians (p. 397).

Fanon’s description of heroism exhibits some differences compared to the previous writers. In *The wretched of the earth* (1963), he views heroism as the conduct of a collective power emerging from the people’s struggle for liberation. He emphasizes that collective heroism lies in unity, solidarity, and the collective effort that arises from the people, which is crucial for effective resistance. He asserts that real African heroes are those who resist and challenge the white regime and make sacrifices in order to regain their culture and dignity. In this respect, we find in Achebe’s novel a sense of collectivity when Umuofia’s people decide to burn the church of the white

missionaries, representing an attempt at collective heroism. Additionally, we can see that the Igbo people strive to preserve their traditions and customs, which is a central concern of the whole community in resisting the imposed foreign beliefs and systems and preserving their identity. However, this unity and solidarity do not last long; by the end of the novel, the Igbo people begin to disintegrate and divide, leading to the diminishing of their traditions and rituals. This fragmentation and the lack of unity in the face of colonial pressure contribute to their downfall in general and that of the hero in particular. Okonkwo experiences strong frustration from his fellow villagers, which leads to his collapse. Fanon clarifies that the hero always needs help from the community; glory and success come through unity and collective action, and when a society lacks these elements, it becomes easy for the colonizer to intrude and divide the colonized community.

He also describes heroism as a profound transformation of consciousness that should arise in the souls of the people under the concept of “national consciousness” against the colonial powers in order to achieve their independence. In this respect, Fanon wrote: “The greatest task before us is to understand at each moment what is happening in our country. We ought not to cultivate the exceptional or to seek a hero who is merely another form of a leader; we ought to uplift the people, develop their minds, fill them with ideas, change them, and make them into human beings” (p. 196-97).

### III. 3. Okonkwo as a tragic figure

From a noble and honorable status marked by great success in Umuofia, the protagonist's position as a leader and hardworking member of his community led him to be recognized as an epic hero. However, after returning from seven years of exile, aiming to restore the old order of Igbo society which no longer exists, he finds a new governmental and religious system imposed by the white men, driving him into a problematic state full of inner conflict and instability. This dramatic shift from an epic to a problematic state leads him to a tragic end, which is the focus of our case study in this section of the thesis. According to Aristotle, the tragic hero must have a noble career, occupy a high status in society, and possess a flaw that leads to an eventual downfall usually stemming from the hero's arrogance and overconfidence.

In his *Aristotle Poetics* (1996) Heath wrote:

Tragedy is an imitation of an action that is admirable, complete and possesses magnitude; in language made pleasurable, each of its species separated in different parts; performed by actors, not through narration; effecting through pity and fear the purification of such emotions. (p. 10)

Thus, according to Aristotle, the action performed by the character is imitated and possesses a certain magnitude, meaning it is the action that should be imitated, not the human being. The latter is happy as a result of his actions, or the reverse. In this regard, he wrote: "Tragedy is not an imitation of persons, but of actions and of life. Well-being and ill-being reside in action, and the goal of life is an activity, not a quality" (p. 11). For him, "there could not be a tragedy without action, but there could be one without character" (p. 12). So, Okonkwo in Achebe's *Things fall apart* imitates the virtues and values of his society, struggling for success, honor, and masculinity. However, his excessive pride, fear of weakness, and imitation of the cultural ideals brought about his tragic fate. According to Draper, in his *Tragedy* (1980), "Dramatic action, therefore, is not with a view to the representation of character: character comes in as subsidiary to the actions" (p. 42). The most important components of tragedy reside in the necessity of the plot and the character,

with the former considered the soul of tragedy and the latter secondary, in addition to reversals, fear, and pity by which tragedy sways emotion.

As stated at the beginning, the hero must have a noble status, as Aristotle affirms. However, in Achebe's *Things fall apart*, nobility is not inherited like in most tragic works. For Okonkwo, his nobility is achieved; he worked day and night to shape his position, build his wealth, and carry the title of leader in his community. His father's bad reputation pushed him to become an ambitious and successful man who constantly strives to reach better situations and higher ranks. He is a wrestler, a warrior, a representative of his tribe, a man of justice, and he sits with the 'egwugwu'. Okonkwo is a self-made man, greatness was not thrust upon him, but he worked hard to become famous and well-known throughout the nine villages and beyond. Achebe wrote: "His fame rested on solid personal achievements" (p. 3). It is clear that Okonkwo's nobility is truly earned through his strong personal will and powerful dignity, characteristics that define him as a true African character always striving for success and greatness. This is one of the main features Aristotle emphasizes in a tragic hero—the importance of the protagonist having a noble career. In order for the hero to be a tragic one, this nobility must be followed by a tragic flaw, which evidently leads the protagonist to his downfall. The latter is generally due to the arrogance and overconfidence of the hero. Aristotle argues, "*Harmatia*, then, includes errors made in ignorance or through misjudgment; but it will also include moral errors of a kind which do not imply wickedness [...] The change to bad fortune must come about because of a *harmatia*" (p. xxxiii). So, according to him, a tragic flaw or *harmatia* is the result of errors in judgment and those made in ignorance. This concept fits well with Achebe's hero, Okonkwo, whose flaw comes from the different aspects that the new order imposed on him in particular and his society in general.

Okonkwo is a man who committed suicide because of his inner conflicts, personal refusal of the new regime brought by the white man to his land, as well as his son's conversion to the Europeans'

religion. The changes introduced by the colonizers disrupted the unified, peaceful, and honorable life the Igbo society once lived, leading to the collapse and disintegration of the old order and the traditional way of life in his tribe. After returning from exile, his reputation and respect had diminished due to the erosion of values and social virtues his society faced. Okonkwo experienced personal turmoil and psychological distress when he found a complete transformation in his clan, with a new system of life and religious domination by the Christian missionaries, which had a profound effect on his son Nwoye, who adopted Christianity.

Unable to adapt to colonization and having lost hope in his future, Okonkwo's despair ultimately led to his downfall. His arrogance, pride, and overconfidence also contributed to his tragedy. These traits may have been the result of an inner fear—a fear that drives a person to improve themselves by continually imposing their actions and decisions on others, and fostering a sense of self-love that leads to arrogance, excessive confidence, and blindness. This is well illustrated in:

Only a week ago, a man contradicted him at a kindred meeting which they held to discuss the next ancestral feast. Without looking at the man Okonkwo had said: 'This meeting is for men.' The man who had contradicted him had no titles. That was why he had called him a woman. Okonkwo knew how to kill a man's spirit. (p. 19)

Another distinguished feature of a tragic hero is the reversal of fortune. "The change of fortune is a new element, but fits in with Aristotle's first argument for the primacy of plot. The change from good fortune to bad corresponds to the failure in action that evokes pity" (Heath, 1996, p. xxv). Okonkwo disintegrated from a powerful man full of strength, masculinity, and ambition to a tragic state for himself and his community. His misfortune came when he inadvertently killed his clansman's son, and "The only course open to Okonkwo was to flee from the clan. It was a crime against the earth goddess to kill a clansman, and a man who committed it must flee from the land" (p. 87). Even though he had gained several titles during his career, he lost them after killing this boy. He was forced to leave his land and was banished to his mother's land, Mbanta. His crime is

considered a female one because it was inadvertent. Okonkwo blames his *chi*, or personal god, for his situation when he thinks that:

Then everything had been broken. He had been cast out of his clan like a fish onto a dry, sandy beach, panting. Clearly, his personal god or *chi* was not made for great things. A man could not rise beyond the destiny of his *chi*. The saying of the elders was not true \_ that if a man said yea his *chi* also affirmed. Here was a man whose *chi* said nay despite his own affirmation. (p. 92)

It has been said that God puts His people under tests, and if this test is provided for Okonkwo, then he fails it because he feels despair and has no will or love for work anymore. Achebe wrote: “The old man, Uchendu, saw clearly that Okonkwo has yield to despair and he was greatly troubled. He would speak to him after the isa-ifi ceremony” (p. 92). What happened to Okonkwo is a reversion to the character of his father Unoka in terms of laziness, despair, and a lack of will or enthusiasm, unlike before. The author states: “Work no longer had for him the pleasure it used to have, and when there was no work to do, he sat in a silent half-sleep” (p. 92). This act of reversal led him to an eventual breakdown, which is seen as a lack of human potential and is due to excessive pride. When Okonkwo returned from exile, he was astonished by the new system his society had adopted. Instead of learning how to deal with the new regime alongside his clansmen, he lost hope for his life, which led him to commit suicide by hanging himself from a tree behind his house. This marks his official collapse, decay, and reversal, where he would not be remembered fondly by the clansmen of Umuofia, as was the case with his father Unoka. It was Okonkwo’s fault and free choice that led him to such an end, but his misfortune is not truly deserved for such a hero.

The facts presented above and the reading of the novel lead the reader to feel a kind of pity and fear that Achebe arouses in *Things Fall Apart*, which are two of the main aspects that Aristotle emphasized in his definition of tragedy. Heath stated, “According to his definition, tragedy ‘effect[s] through pity and fear the purification of such emotions’ [...] here it is sufficient to note that tragedy aims to excite a response of pity and fear. Tragedy is ‘an imitation... of events that

evoke fear and pity” (p. xxi). He also wrote: “effecting through pity and fear the purification [katharsis] of such emotions” (p. xxxvii). He added, “The relief that katharsis brings is pleasurable. A pleasure that comes from the katharsis of pity and fear is, at any rate, not shared with comedy. So the question arises whether this kathartic pleasure is the characteristic pleasure of tragedy” (p. xxxviii). So, katharsis, according to Aristotle, is the act of purging the emotions of pity and fear that are aroused in the reader’s soul. It helps the reader to feel relief from some actions that are related to these two concepts.

This aspect is clear at the beginning of the fourth chapter when an old man contradicts Okonkwo in a meeting that is held to discuss important matters. Without looking at him, Okonkwo says: “This meeting is for men” (p. 19). Because this man has no titles, Okonkwo knows well how to kill one’s spirit, and this reveals his harsh behavior. His killing of Ikemefuna is also an event that evokes deep pity. He kills him because of his pride, showing his masculinity and fear of appearing weak among his fellows, despite Ogbuefi Ezeudu advising him not to bear a hand in killing the boy. Achebe wrote:

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

This action arouses fear and pity in the heart of the reader, as well as in his mind, leading him to wonder how Ikemefuna will die and who will kill him. Is it true that Okonkwo is the one who will kill Ikemefuna? All these questions arise in the reader’s mind, creating a sense of fear for Ikemefuna’s situation and destiny. Okonkwo harbors a hidden love for this boy because he made his son feel more confident; the lad calls him "father." Despite their relationship, Okonkwo kills him out of fear of being considered weak.

Another feature that provokes the reader's pity and fear occurs in the middle of the seventeenth chapter when Okonkwo learns that his son Nyowe has converted to Christianity and has been attending the Christian missionaries secretly. Unfortunately, it is Okonkwo's cousin Amikwu who informs him about his son. The following dialogue shows how Okonkwo...

Where have you been? he stammered.

Nyowe struggled to free himself from the choking grip.

"Answer me," roared Okonkwo, "before I kill you!" he seized a heavy stick that lay on the dwarf wall and hit him two or three savage blows.

"Answer me!" he roared again. Nyowe stood looking at him and did not say a word. The women were screaming outside, afraid to go in. (p. 107)

Then, Nyowe walks away and never returns. Okonkwo is completely despairing after his son's conversion to Christianity. In addition to Ezinma's problem with the ogbanje, the priestess Chielo comes and calls for her, stating that Agbala wants to see her. Here, the reader feels fear for Ezinma, wondering whether she will be seen alive again. This pushes Okonkwo and his wife, Ekwefi, to try to protect their daughter from such danger. Fortunately, Chielo brings Ezinma back to her parents in good health.

Another characteristic is used by the writer is the Africanization of the Greek tragedy. Through our research, we have found many heroes that are considered epic. In this regard, we tend to exhibit the work of Okpewho in *The epic in Africa*, where he is skilled at capturing prominent epic heroes in African literature from origin tales. *The epic of Sundiata* is a tale of triumph, conquest in West Africa, and cultural richness that can be appreciated by anyone. Several professional storytellers, known as 'griots,' have passed on the tale of Sundiata orally to future generations. It is about the founder of the Mali Empire in the 13th century and deals with Sundiata's rise to power, his struggle against adversity, and his eventual triumph as a great warrior and leader. The epic goes hand in hand with the themes of heroism, destiny, and the importance of community and tradition. Okpewho wrote:

At ten years of age, for instance, Sunjata's 'arms had the strength of ten and his biceps inspired fear in his companions he had already that authoritative way of speaking which belongs to those who are destined to command'(IV. 23). this image becomes significant when later he and his family are driven into exile and obliged to seek asylum with neighbouring rulers. (p. 94)

Senghor, in his poem "Chaka" (1951), attempts to celebrate the African figure by portraying Chaka Zulu as a mythic and legendary figure in African history. Through this character, Senghor pioneers the reclamation of pride and heroism in African identity and heritage by presenting Chaka's leadership, strength, and courage. The hero's power extends to the achievement of the unification and consolidation of several Zulu tribes into a united nation and a cohesive society. He makes significant reforms that are seen as innovative strategies he introduced to revolutionize Zulu warfare. Chaka is also depicted as a strong and powerful warrior, a military genius, and a symbolic figure in African history through his significant achievements and considerable deeds. Malaba, in his "*Reconstruction of History: The Case Study of Shaka*" (2007), presents Senghor's hero in the poem "Chaka," showcasing his greatness and bravery as follows:

He who beats but is not beaten, unlike water,  
Axe that surpasses other axes in sharpness;  
Shaka, I fear to say he is Shaka,  
Shaka he is chief of the Mashobas. (p. 3)

Dealing with Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, we observe that Okonkwo's actions are similar to those of the Greeks. In Sophocles' play *Ajax*, the famous Greek warrior Ajax falls into deep despair after being denied the armor of Achilles, and because of his shame and anger, he commits suicide. Like Okonkwo, who is a great, proud, and respected leader in the Igbo community, he takes his own life after feeling powerless and devastated by the changes brought about by colonialism. Both Ajax and Okonkwo experience a profound sense of failure, despair, and loss of honor, leading them to tragic ends. Even concerning their bodies, Ulysses made a speech for Ajax's body; they have to celebrate him because he is a man of society. Similarly, Okonkwo, even after committing suicide, is buried with honor because he is also a man of society and deserves a

monument. Achebe wrote: “He did not sleep at night. He tried not to think about Ikemefuna, but the more he tried, the more he thought about him” (p. 44). Here, we can sense Okonkwo’s regret after killing Ikemefuna, where his action was a result of his fear and rigid adherence to his cultural values. This is similar to Achilles, whose pride and anger led him to tragic outcomes in the Trojan War, especially the death of his friend Patroclus. In addition, the Igbo society and Greek culture share similarities in their way of life, placing importance on honor, bravery, and communal values. Both cultures emphasize oral tradition, storytelling, and the conveying of their cultural heritage from one generation to another. They also value hospitality, respect for elders, and give great importance to their gods.

Keeping in the same context, we notice Achebe’s use of myth to describe how the Igbo people teach their children the history and values of their ancestors. He deepens the reader’s understanding of Igbo culture and traditions and explores themes of fate, cultural beliefs, and the clash between tradition and change in Igbo society. He fills the story with cultural richness and authenticity, offering readers a unique way to understand the characters and their motivations. In doing so, in the first pages of the novel, the author describes Okonkwo’s prowess and bravery when fighting Amalinze the Cat. His fighting is seen by his peers as an incredible art, which can be considered mythic, as he defeated the most dangerous wrestler in the nine villages, whose back had never touched the earth. Then, Achebe expands his skill to present the quarrel between the earth and the sky as a symbolic representation of the conflict between Okonkwo and society in terms of tradition and change, as well as individual desires and social expectations. In Igbo cosmogony, the earth and the sky are seen as husband and wife; this idea is well illustrated in:

Gradually the rains became lighter and less frequent, and earth and sky once again became separate. The rain fell in thin, slanting showers through sunshine and quiet breeze. Children no longer stayed indoors but ran about singing:

The rain is falling, the sun is shining,  
Alone Nnadi is cooking and eating. (p. 25)

Exploring the ninth chapter, a central part of the novel around which the whole story is organized, we find a very important element that makes the entire book revolve around it: the ogbanje myth, or *Abiku*, even though Achebe's work is primarily realistic. This tragic myth greatly affects Okonkwo and his wife, Ekwefi, as nine of their children die because of this iba, which is known as a child possessed by an evil spirit that leaves the child's body after death only to enter the mother's womb to be reborn in the next child's body. This idea is also explored in *Idanre* and other poems written for Abiku:

Wanderer child. It is the same child who dies and returns again and again to plug the mother\_ Yoruba belief.

In vain your bangles cast

Charmed circles at my feet

I am Abiku, calling for the first

And the repeated time. (p. 28)

The hero and his wife were in great trouble because of their daughter Ezinma, who was called the ogbanje child; she is the only surviving child. Achebe wrote: "Ekwefi had suffered a good deal in her life. She had borne ten children, and nine of them had died in infancy, usually before the age of three. As she buried one child after another, her sorrow gave way to despair and then to grim resignation" (p. 54). To cure her, the medicine man urged her to show him where her *iyi-uwa* was hidden so that he could stop it and recover Ezinma. He did so, and love and life returned to Ekwefi's soul. The author added:

Okagbue went back into the pit, which was now surrounded by spectators. After a few more how-fuls of earth he struck the *iyi-uwa*. He raised it carefully with the hoe and threw it to the surface. Some women ran away in fear when it was thrown. But they soon returned and everyone was gazing at the rag from a reasonable distance. (p. 59)

In general, it is clear that Achebe's hero incorporates the Aristotelian tragic figure, as Okonkwo closely resembles the characteristics Aristotle presents from the imitation of action that Okonkwo embodies in his society, portraying its values and culture, to a tragic flaw or '*hamartia*' that leads

him to ultimate decay and collapse. His reversal is a result of rash actions driven by excessive pride, along with the pity and fear that the reader or audience feels when reading the novel, where 'catharsis' is needed to purify one's feelings and emotions. All these features qualify Okonkwo as a tragic hero who encompasses the Greek tragic characteristics that Aristotle asserted and ultimately resembles their tragic heroes in terms of actions and character. Additionally, Achebe enhances his work by using mythic elements to illustrate the richness of the Igbo world in terms of culture and traditions, as well as the efforts made to preserve these traditions and pass them down from one generation to another.

Numerous critics have engaged with the character of Okonkwo, and there seems to be no consensus regarding the suicide of the protagonist in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. These critics discuss how Okonkwo embodies both admirable qualities as a leader of the Umuofia community and destructive flaws that lead to his downfall, reflecting the complexities of human nature. The most important issue these critics tend to clarify and discuss is the matter of Okonkwo's suicide, which has sparked the curiosity of various authors seeking to understand the true reasons behind his act. Wilson, in his *Hero Worshipping in the African Novel*, observes that Okonkwo commits suicide "to escape the results of his rash courage against the white man" (p. 4). Britwum counters this idea, arguing that Wilson's observation is 'wrong.' She asserts that Okonkwo finds himself 'alone' after his community accepts the white man's regime, adding: "Everybody else seems to have accepted the ignominy of living under foreign domination never before known in Umuofia. Patria ou morte. He walks off on a lonely road—out of it all" (p. 4). This indicates that after his seven years of exile, Okonkwo becomes more conservative and rejects change. He cannot accept that his community has responded to colonial powers and submitted to their regime. His rigid personality and strong adherence to traditional values drive him to feel shame for the Umuofia people who adopt the European way of life. This argument clearly contrasts with Wilson's view that Okonkwo fled due to

his rash courage. His suicide stems not from a lack of courage, but from his rejection of the changing atmosphere that Umuofia is experiencing.

Numerous arguments support the idea that Okonkwo's suicide was driven by his strong refusal to accept his people's paralysis and their adaptation to the white man's system and way of life. In this regard, Moore, in *Seven African Writers* (1962), states: "Okonkwo cannot reconcile himself to the paralysis of will which he senses around him" (p. 108). Moore observes that Okonkwo took his own life due to this perceived paralysis of will among his people. He concludes that the people of Umuofia had become comfortable living under European power and would never participate in defending their land or their cultural values and traditions. This realization likely fueled Okonkwo's despair, as he saw no true Igbo spirit or character in them. This idea is reinforced by Ravenscroft's observations on Achebe's work, where he notes: "He hangs himself, not to avoid arrest, but out of despair for the future of his people" (p. 108). According to him, Okonkwo was not afraid of being arrested by the white man; rather, he had lost hope in his people and recognized that with such a mentality, they would never regain their dignity or the precious values that their ancestors had built over the years for future generations to inherit and uphold.

However, these critics and many admirers of Achebe work have largely ignored and disregarded fundamental techniques used in his novel. Thus, towards the end of the novel, Achebe displaces the characterization of the hero by putting him within the context of the tragic heroic tradition. He makes the hero committing suicide in the wake of the killing of an African agent of the white commissioner in Umuofia. In his analysis of Okonkwo's gesture, Frazer has argued that Okonkwo's suicidal act is due to the collapse of the community of Umuofia referring implicitly and explicitly to Durkheim and his notion of 'anomie'. Following the lead of Durkheim, Frazer writes what follows: "Igbo society has been plunged into anomy by the intervention of the British. In this new world of slipping realities the villagers have lost their bearings. Okonkwo in some ways their most typical hero, is completely, at a loss to explain the change" (p. 112).

Admittedly, what Frazer said about Okonkwo's suicide has some truth in it. Indeed, at first sight, Umuofia is described as a community gone loose through the intrusion of the white man and his values. Things have fallen apart, and it is logical that the hero who represents this community would fall too because of the disappearance. However, we would argue that these surface details giving the impression that Umuofia has reached the state of anomie are deluding. The suicide is a tragic one and this is what Achebe wants us to see. And Okonkwo's act takes all the way back to the beginning of the novel. For him, the tragedy hides beneath or behind the details. The theatrical aspect of the tragedy in the novel is signaled most importantly in the description of the dispersal of the Umuofian assembly as follows:

The waiting backcloth jumped into tumultuous life and the meeting was stopped. Okonkwo stood looking at the dead man. He knew that Umuofia would not go to war. He knew because they let the other messengers escape. They had broken into tumult instead of action. He discerned fright in tumult. He heard voices asking 'why did he do it?' He wiped his machet on the sand and went away. (p. 145)

The backcloth in the citation, we would argue, is Achebe's way of saying that his novel is not about anomie but about tragedy. The disappearance of Umuofian unity as one body influenced the hero's behavior when he recognized that his people would never unite to go to war against the Europeans. This response can be traced back to his deep-seated fear of failure and weakness, which drove him to be overly aggressive and rigid in his beliefs. It also reflects a tragic cycle of violence and pride, mirroring his character's struggle with traditional values and the transgressions of colonialism. His actions echo the tensions and conflicts present at the beginning of the novel, asserting the tragic inevitability of his destiny and the tragic downfall of his character.

In his *Poetics*, Aristotle defines tragedy as a morally ambiguous genre in which a noble hero goes from good fortune to bad fortune. Thus, the tragic hero, according to him, must be a "character between these two extremes." This is exactly what happened to Okonkwo, who was in a high position as a leader of his community and a great wrestler with a prominent standing among his peers, but who ultimately became an alienated person struggling with severe psychological disorder

after the arrival of the Europeans. This state led him to fall and commit suicide under pressure and difficult circumstances. This act clearly embodies the Aristotelian aspects of tragedy, particularly the fear of failure that the author incarnates in order for the work to be truly tragic. The tragic nature of Achebe's piece is apparent right from the beginning of the novel; when someone reads it, they can sense and anticipate the story's end.

In addition, Achebe uses foil characters in the novel. These characters exist between two closely tied figures with approximately opposite personalities in a shared cultural context. Thematically, this contrast helps to develop *Things Fall Apart* as a tragic novel by highlighting the flaws and weaknesses in the characters that are foiled. There are two primary character foils in the novel: the first is Obeirika, who serves as a foil to Okonkwo. While Okonkwo is a man of action, known for his fear of showing emotions as a sign of femininity and his inability to socially connect, he is often rash and foolish in his actions and decisions, eager to demonstrate his masculinity. In contrast, Obeirika is a man of words and of little action. He remains calm and composed in conflict situations, capable of thinking and deciding clearly when things are falling apart. This contrast reveals Okonkwo's weaknesses, his lack of communication skills, and his ignorant reliance on brute force, while Obeirika is portrayed as someone who can question Igbo culture. The second foil character is Nyowe, who represents Ikemefuna. Both share a common cultural background, attempting to meet their fathers' expectations of manhood. In this regard, Achebe highlights the impractical elements and cultural flaws in Okonkwo's perception of masculinity. Ikemefuna is portrayed as learned, mature, strict, and pre-paternal, as Achebe writes: "Okonkwo's son, Nyowe, who was two years younger, became quite inseparable from him because he seemed to know everything" (p. 20). In contrast, Nyowe is characterized by childishness, ignorance, dependence, and a yearning for guidance, which leads Okonkwo to perceive him as lazy. Achebe notes: "Okonkwo's first son, Nyowe, was then twelve years old but was already causing his father great anxiety for his incipient laziness" (p. 10). Ikemefuna earns Okonkwo's admiration, prompting

Nyowe to try to emulate him in terms of masculinity and to distance himself from his childish thoughts and feminine weaknesses. Thus, with Ikemefuna's death, all of Nyowe's weaknesses are revealed; he is shown to be completely dependent on Ikemefuna, and his confidence and masculinity were never intrinsic to his personality. This illustrates the significance of the character foil in the narrative.

In general, *Things fall apart* can be seen as a tragedy not just of the hero's actions but also of the Igbo culture, which is radicalized by Okonkwo's interpretation that reflects his weaknesses and fears. Achebe's foils between Nyowe and Ikemefuna, as well as Okonkwo and Obeirika, help to highlight Okonkwo's tragic flaws and his self-interpreted culture that ultimately leads to the disintegration of his world.

These elements that Achebe implements in his work make the novel a monument that is very significant in literature, erected in celebration of a tragic figure. Obeirika says that Okonkwo is a remarkable man: "That man was one of the greatest men in Umuofia" (p. 147). His story is one of ambition, pride, and eventual downfall, reflecting the complexities of colonialism's impact on traditional African societies. He stands as a symbol of his culture's strengths and weaknesses, representing its history and struggles. The novel serves as a powerful representation of the effects of colonialism on Africa, acting as a monument to the resilience and complexities of African culture and identity. In addition to the universal and timeless themes that Achebe explores in his novel those of tradition, change, and the clash of cultures drawing its position as a monument in the literary landscape.

### **III. 5. Obierika or the hero as intellectual**

The character Achebe portrays to represent the intellectual class in Igbo society is Obierika. Through his embodiment of wisdom, critical thinking, and traditional knowledge, he fulfills the African need for intellectuals, showcasing the importance of indigenous intelligence and expertise in African societies. This challenges the colonial narrative that asserts African cultures lack intellectual depth. Fanon, in *The wretched of the earth* (1968), emphasizes the need for a native intellectual who plays a crucial role in the fight against colonialism. He asserts, “The native intellectual who comes back to his people by way of cultural achievements behaves in fact like a foreigner” (p. 223). In the novel, Obierika consistently critiques and reflects on Umuofian traditions, questioning their customs and the changes brought by the Europeans. Achebe wrote:

Obeirika was a man who thought about things. When the will of the goddess had been done, he set down in his *obi* and mourned his friend’s calamity. Why should a man suffer so grievously for an offence he had committed inadvertently? [...] he remembered his wife’s twin children, whom he had thrown away. What crime have they committed? (p. 87)

Obierika also tries to defend his people, and this is very apparent in the novel when, after Okonkwo hanged himself, Obierika said: “That man was one of the greatest men in Umuofia” (p. 147). He always stands on behalf of his people, trying to protect the image of his community. As Fanon explained: “The native finds that he is expected to answer for everything, and to all comers. He not only turns himself into the defender of his people’s past; he is willing to be counted as one of them”(p.218).

Obierika’s wisdom and leadership are also evident during the meeting of the village elders, where he provides thoughtful insights and guidance, highlighting the depth of knowledge and leadership in African society. A scene of intellectualism is shown in the following Socratic dialogue between Okonkwo and Obierika on the killing of Ikemefuna:

“I cannot understand why you refused to come with us to kill that boy,” he asked Obierika.

“Because I did not want to,” Obierika replied sharply. “I had something better to do.”

“You sound as if you question the authority and the decision of the Oracle, who said he should die”

“I do not, Why should I? But the Oracle did not ask me to carry out its decision”

“But someone had to do it. If we were all afraid of blood, it would not be done. And what do you think the Oracle would do then?” (p. 45)

Then, Obierika continued his speech, trying to convince Okonkwo that what he was planning to do would not please the Earth goddess and that it was not a deed to take pride in.

Obierika’s success as a prosperous trader challenges stereotypes about African economic abilities. When Obierika visited Okonkwo during his exile, he brought him heavy bags and said: “That is the money from your yams,” he said. “I sold the big ones as soon as you left. Later on, I sold some of the seed-yams and gave others to sharecroppers. I shall do that every year until you return. But I thought you would need the money now, so I brought it. Who knows what may happen tomorrow?” (p. 100). Obierika discusses business dealings with Okonkwo, showing his wisdom and entrepreneurial spirit. His integrity, loyalty, and friendship are evident throughout the novel, particularly in his relationship with Okonkwo. When Okonkwo’s son leaves his father’s household, Obierika shows empathy and support for Okonkwo, despite their differing perspectives on certain matters. These traits reveal Obierika’s multifaceted character and how his portrayal in the novel contributes to challenging stereotypes about Africa.

The intellectuality that Achebe presents in the character of Obierika represents the critical and reflective native who understands the colonial implications and seeks to resist them. It is a means to restore African culture in general, and its identity in particular, serving as a sword against the imperial literature that attempts to distort African society and overthrow its civilization and traditional values. Writing back to the empire is seen as an act of revenge that African writers engage in to regain their dignity and recover the lost positive perception of Africa in the eyes of Europeans.

## Conclusion

Our master's thesis, entitled *Of the three faces of the hero in Achebe's Things fall apart*, explores the evolution of the protagonist from an epic hero to a problematic figure and ultimately to a tragic hero. Initially, he is portrayed as an epic hero: a strong, powerful, respected, and ambitious warrior who upholds traditional values and achieves greatness within his community. However, as the narrative unfolds, his rigid adherence to these values leads him into a problematic state, marked by behavior and conflicts, particularly as he struggles to adapt to the changing circumstances brought about by colonialism. His inability to accept or change in response to new realities drives him to his downfall, marking him as a tragic hero whose fate serves as a cautionary tale about the consequences of stubbornness and resistance to change. This evolution in the character of Okonkwo reflects Achebe's exploration of the complexities of human nature and society.

Achebe implemented several elements that led his work to be considered a monument celebrating an African tragic figure who embodies both strength and weakness. *Things Fall Apart* serves as a powerful representation of resilience in the face of the heavy years of colonialism that greatly affected the lives of African people, establishing itself as a monument in the literary world. In addition, these struggles contribute to the recognition of African heroes, ensuring they have a crucial place in the memory of post-colonial Africa, which helps build a future that honors its past and its heroes.

Throughout the analysis of Achebe's work, we reached the conclusion that the novel depicts pre-colonial and colonial Africa. The first part of the novel can be seen as a celebration of African civilization, customs, and traditions, where the author illustrates the true nature and daily life of Igbo society while portraying the epic character of Okonkwo. Through his storytelling technique, he skillfully presents the African oral tradition and its values to the reader and audience. With the arrival of the white men in the second part of the novel, we observe a diminishing use of proverbs

from the first part, a shift in language, and disintegration in the portrayal of Igbo land, marking the dominance of colonial power. Achebe employs a realistic mode of writing that allows the reader to inhabit the novel's characters, experience their roles, and feel their lives, making the story resonate as genuine.

In our analysis of the novel, we aimed to demonstrate that the death of the protagonist in Achebe's *Things fall apart* is indeed tragic. We relied on the framework of Aristotelian tragedy, where the author successfully implements the characteristics of this model in his hero, Okonkwo. Okonkwo closely resembles Greek tragic heroes in terms of greatness, leadership, and power, while also possessing flaws such as fear and arrogance that ultimately lead to his inevitable downfall. This tragic end is foreshadowed from the very beginning of the novel; the clues are subtly woven into the details, allowing readers to recognize that the conclusion will be a tragic one.

The monomyth features a hero who embarks on a journey that begins with an adventure, followed by challenges and transformation, ultimately leading to a return. However, this return is often not accepted due to the changes that have occurred, leading the hero to a tragic end. Additionally, the Africanization of Greek tragedy is evident through the cyclical events depicted in the novel, making the role of mythology particularly apparent, especially in the case of the *ogbanje*, which greatly influences Okonkwo's family, particularly his daughter Ezinma. Furthermore, examples from Okpewho's *The epic in Africa* celebrate the notion of heroism in Africa. These elements contribute to the novel's classification as a tragic work.

In his masterpiece, Achebe intricately weaves post-colonial themes, offering a profound critique of the impact of colonialism on African societies. Through the lens of post-colonial theory, the author illuminates the complexities of power dynamics, cultural clashes, and the erasure of indigenous traditions. Achebe challenges colonial narratives by reclaiming agency for African characters and exposing the devastating consequences of colonial intervention. Thus, *Things Fall*

*Apart* stands as a seminal work in post-colonial literature, countering the distorted European portrayal of Africa and reshaping perspectives on history, identity, and the legacy of colonialism.

## References

- Achebe, C. (1986). *Things fall apart*. London: Heinemann. African writer series. Print.
- Aristotle. (1996). *Poetics* (M, Heath, Trans.). London: Penguin Books. Print.
- Begam, R. (1997). Achebe's sense an ending: History and tragedy in "Things Fall Apart". *The Johns Hopkins Press*. 29(3), 396-411. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org>.
- Bloom, H. (2010). Bloom's *modern critical interpretation: Chinua Achebe's Things fall apart*. New York, N.Y: An Imprint of Infobase Publishing. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org>.
- Britwum, A. (1991). Hero Worshipping in the African Novel (The Case of Ayi Kwei Armah and Others). *Asemka*, (03), 01-13.
- Campbell, J. (1968). *The hero with a thousand faces*. New Jersey, N.J: Princeton University Press. Print. Originally published in 1949.
- Conrad, J. (1994). *Heart of darkness*. London: Penguin Popular Classics. Print. Originally published in 1902.
- Draper, R.D. (Ed). (1980). *Tragedy: Development in criticism*. London: The Macmilan Pess. Print.
- Fanon, F. (1968). *The wretched of the earth*. Washington: Black Cats Editions. Print. Originally published in 1961.
- Frazer, R. (1979). A note on Okonkwo's suicide. *Kunapipi*. I (1), (108-113).
- Frye, N. (1990). *Anatomy of criticism*. London. Penguin Books. Print. Originally published in 1957.

- Granqvist, R. (1984). The early Swedish reviews of Chinua Achebe's *Things fall apart and a man of the people*. *Indian University Press*. 15(3), 394-404. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org>.
- Lukács, G. (1971). *The theory of the novel* (A, Bostock, Trans.). Washington: First MIT Press edition. Print. Originally published in 1920.
- Lukács, G. (1972). *Studies in European realism* (E, Bone, Trans.). London: The Merlin Press Ltd. Print. Originally published in 1950.
- Ngugi, W. T. (1967). *A grain of wheat*. London: Penguin Books. Print.
- Okpewho, I. (1975). *The epic in Africa: Towards a poetics of the oral performance*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press. Print.
- Robert, M. (Ed.). (1965). *The Faber book of modern verse*. London: Faber paper covered editions. Print. Originally published in 1936.
- Soyinka, W. (1967). *Idanre and other poems*. London: Methuen. Print.
- University of Zimbabwe. (2007). *The 'mfecane' aftermath: Towards a new paradigm 6-9 September 1991*. Harere, Zimbabwe: Author.
- Whittaker, D & Msiska, M.H. (2007). *Chinua Achebe's Things fall apart*. New York, N.Y: Taylor & Francis e-Library. Print.