The Effects Of Symbolic Interaction In Chinua Achebe’s Things Fall Apart (1958)

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Abstract

The study investigates the various gender roles that fall within the traditional realm and the negative and positive attitudes of the gender on their own life. The study's significance stems from gender discussions in the context of symbolic interaction theory, which investigates the novel in terms of behaviour, physical appearance, sources of power, and communication patterns and compares it to the culture brought upon the Igbo culture of Africa. The study found that human action and interaction can only be understood through exchanging meaningful communication or symbols. The study also examined that man existed in both the natural and symbolic environments which invigorate man’s mental process with the help of the mutual meaning and values through symbols.

Key Words: Symbolic interaction, Things Fall Apart, Society, communication, environment

Background of the Study

Much of the Igbo cultural proverbs and society myths are given in the novel to educate readers about the culture. Furthermore, the author of the novel expressed his oppression of missionaries and the distance of individuals from his society in colonial cultures. The novel also has the characteristic of being written by Achebe who himself was African. However, in past the most of the work was done by European writers. This was of great significance as the perception of European writers was negative and they conveyed Africans to be uneducated and uncivilized peoples. Chinua Achebe (1930-2013) was a Nigerian author best known for his novel Things Fall Apart (1958). The novel depicts the entire cultural background of a fictional Nigerian village. Umuofia is the name of the fictional village in which the novel describes people's lives before and after the arrival of the missionaries. The unexpected arrival of missionaries created mental
dissonance in which people were befuddled and faced perplexing situations regarding how to react to cultural alterations brought by missionaries who posed a significant threat to the institutions, political structure, and cultural life of Igbo culture. The goal of this study was to gain an understanding of gender norms and beliefs that influence the development of various relationships.

**Problem Statement**

The research in hand focuses on the reality of the novel by taking the actual position of Igbo culture and investigates it under the light of theory. Furthermore, the current study also considers the learning of different gender roles that how women and men got the objections from the past. It has been the prosaic truth that a major part of the individual’s behavior comes from the learning of his gender knowledge and the individual adapts his behavior accordingly. For example, social adjustments, general psychology, covert attitude, cognitive function, emotional reaction, and overt behavior are because of this behavior learning (Musse, 1971).

**Literature Review**

During the nineteenth century, many European countries, including Britain, France, Germany, and Portugal, fought amongst themselves for a piece of Africa, a continent rich in resources useful for their manufacturing industries and overseas trade (Kenalemang, 2013). The chiefs of the native Africans were given freedom and rights to administer their local institutions (151). Consequently, native officers felt they were not directed but rather advised by the British officers to develop local government. British indirect rule was considered a compromise mean of controlling colonies (Ahmed, 2018). In this way, people who adopted the French language and culture would be classified as French citizens with certain political rights. They could also work as teachers, clerks, or administrators. Nevertheless, very few Africans could follow that progression. So the vast majority of them were classified as native Africans, foregoing those rights and chances (Flint, 1984). Having been ruled for decades by these two strategies, African countries had both gains and losses. In terms of gains, Africa had more materials and education. With the obligation of 'civilizing' and 'modernizing' African countries, the Europeans brought new farming technologies and also built railroads to facilitate the carriage of their goods and to unify African territories. The Africans learned new methods of farming and could export a large number of agricultural goods resulting in economic growth. Moreover, missionaries also built hospitals and brought new medical treatments and new drugs to Africa to fight diseases. Consequently, life expectancy increased and infant mortality rates decreased (Rhoads, 1993). Goods and products, as well as raw materials, could be easily carried both inside and outside the region by rail once the Europeans had settled. Moreover, the Africans had to pay taxes and customs duties for the construction of railways and make free grants of African land (Ahmed, 2018). Another significant scholarly work was conducted by Linda Strong-Leek in which he attempted to explore Things Fall Apart in the light of feminism. Her main emphasis was on exploring the negativity faced by women of Igbo. She explained in the novel how Okonkwo strictly treated Ekwefi who was well known for her fierce independence, love, and knowledgeable abilities. Linda’s work successfully represented the fierce nature of men for their women. The same disposition of men's nature of putting women under their
effect was investigated by Syed Fagrutheen (2014). In this vein, Fagrutheen demonstrates the Igbo
women to consider as a mere factor of production where the role of women was only limited to
delivery and nurturing of child and not in any type of decision regarding the home of about life or
well-being. The men of Igbo considered the women similar like material possessions and therefore
they had many wives which were also considered as the status symbol in the society (Kenalemang,
2013). The study of this previous work of scholars comes across the finding that the work of
Achebe has not been investigated in the light of postcolonial life. And how the religious strategies
of European colonies affected society, psychology, education, mind, religion, and culture?

Research Methodology
The current study is both qualitative and descriptive. The investigation of the novel Things Fall
Apart in light of symbolic interaction theory continues (Copenhaver, 2002). The primary data
sources for this study are Chinua Achebe's plays Things Fall Apart (1958). The data consists of
dialogues, characters, actions, and valiant to the topic of his research.

Symbolic Interaction Theory
The paper is backed up by Blumer’s the symbolic interaction theory (1969) which depicts the
socialization process where the individual gains knowledge about his culture, analyzes him and
then becomes a functioning member of his community. The self is structured through self-images,
objectives, and words which people take from their community or groups. The self is structured
through self-images, objectives, and words which people take from their community or groups.
The word objects represent the physical things or the things that could be indicated or directed
toward which anyone can point out or refer to. These objects could also be social like friends or
teachers or the idea of a researcher. The word objects represent the physical things or the things
that could be indicated or directed toward which anyone can point out or refer to. These objects
could also be social like friends or teachers or the idea of a researcher. Blumer (1969) concluded
that objects were the true social creations of the society but were understood by the members of
the community.

Analysis and Discussion
This section of the study investigates the novel in the light of symbolic interaction theory. The
examination of the language used in constructing genders in the novel is important as it unveils
the relationships between male and female in society. This is because gender representation is
influenced by unconscious and hidden desires in a man.

Chinua Achebe depicted the primitive lives of Ibo tribesmen in Things Fall Apart. The
number of yams harvested each season was a good indicator of living well. The Nigerian Igbo
people grew yams as a staple and cash crop. As in many farming cultures, the Ibo men were seen
working in the fields and women were responsible for other tasks. Achievement for men in Ibo
society was evaluated by how much yam they could harvest and store. Okonkwo represents all of
the Igbo society.
Women are also portrayed as being frail. "His mother and sisters worked hard enough, but they grew women's crops like coco-yams, beans, and cassava," the text says. Man's crops were yam, the king of crops" (P.22-23). Men grow yams to demonstrate their strength and power. Women are considered weak because they are unable to grow yams. Every powerful trait is associated with men and their masculinity, whereas women are associated with the notion of being weak and incapable of hard labour. Women are regarded as inferior and worthless. In Igbo society, being born as a female is a disgrace.

They prefer and prioritize their son. Son was given significance because he represented power. It is also true that these societies required males to survive and fight for the sake of their societies. Women, on the other hand, were thought to be innocent. They were deemed unworthy of manly activities such as fighting. As Okonkwo puts it, "He thought to himself as he looked at his ten-year-old daughter, "She should have been a boy." He never got over the fact that Ezinma was a girl. When a woman gave birth to her third son, her husband slaughtered a goat in her honour “(P.64). That is the true face of Igbo society: goat slaughtering for a boy's birth and shame and regression for a girl's birth.

Furthermore, Okonkwo committed suicide out of the same pride that drove him to not live with the regret that he is an unworthy man who is unable to do anything for his clan or his people. Furthermore, things have changed dramatically during his seven-year exile from his homeland. Okonkwo found it unbearable that people had become lazier than ever before. They weren't prepared to fight. Okonkwo believed that fear and cowardice were female characteristics, and that a man should not be afraid to fight for his people and clan. A man is considered honorable in Igbo society. Okonkwo had three wives, all of whom he mistreated because he was the head of a patriarchal society. In a patriarchal society, it gives a man the authority to marry more than one woman, whereas women were not permitted to do so. A woman is limited to one man, whereas a man has no restrictions. He can marry whoever he wants whenever he wants. It is up to man's financial and authoritarian approach to do what he wants.

Name, fame, wealth, education, and other factors all contribute to a man's power. The same was true for Okonkwo. Okonkwo derives power from his wealth. He cultivates yams on a large scale. That is how he comes to be wealthy. He beats his wives because they are the source of his power. "I married her with my yams and my money” (P.90). Yams are the king of crops and are very strong. He becomes a leader as a result of his source of power. This also means that in Igbo society, if a man has no crops or yams, he is not considered worthy of marriage. This also means that in Igbo society, if a man has no crops or yams, he is not considered worthy of marriage. Women were bargained for in exchange for yams and crops, as Okonkwo mentions in the preceding lines when he says, "I married this girl with my yams and money." Women were merely a commodity used for the benefit of men.

Okonkwo now wields political authority. He gained recognition and rose to the position of leader. When a wealthy individual, whether from the Igbo or any other society, desires power and
authority, he seeks political office. Politics, in common parlance, is the primary source of power and authority, as Okonkwo sought to become the clan's leader, which proved to be a disaster for him. "His life had been ruled by a great desire to become clan landlords." And he nearly succeeded" (P.131). "Afraid? What he does to you is irrelevant to me but he and those who listen to him are despised. If necessary, I will fight alone" (P.201).

A wife can be beaten in Igbo society. It's similar to a punishment for disobedience. If a woman does not obey her husband's orders, he severely beats her. Okonkwo beats his wives for minor infractions. He beats his youngest wife for going to her friend's house to plait her hair. He becomes enraged when he realizes she is not at home. Women are beaten if they are not deemed worthy. When men believe that women are not following men's orders, they beat them. This means that men use the beating as a tool to demonstrate their power and authority over women. "And when she returned, he severely beaten her", (P.29)

Men have complete control over women. They are persecuted. "No matter how prosperous a man was, if he couldn't rule his wife and children (especially his wife), he wasn't a real man" (P.53). The ability to control women is the most important aspect of masculinity. It implies that they have no choice but to reveal their power. Men are self-sufficient because women are confined to their homes. Women are not allowed to demonstrate their abilities. They are not permitted to work alone outside. They must be subject to some male authority who orders them to do this and that. Also, a man who cannot control his wife/wife is not considered a real man. Okonkwo's father was a wonderful figure. As a result, Okonkwo strives for power and fame as a man, working even harder to reclaim his father's name and pride.

Okonkwo, the main figure of this novel is the main example of this behavior. He uses harsh language during the communication with family or wives and society. Using harsh language is the trait of Igbo society's man whereas women are not considered to do such kinds of things. Using harsh language is the trait of Igbo society's man whereas women are not considered to do such kinds of things. It is clear from the text, “without further argument Okonkwo gave her a sound beating and left her and her only daughter to weeping. No other wives are dared to interfere” (P.38). It shows that no one dares to speak in front of Okonkwo. Even his elder wives cannot speak in front of him because they fear that they would also be beaten if they dare to say anything in favor of the younger wife. Okonkwo feels that showing affection is a sign of weakness. He loves his sons but never expresses his love to them. Similarly, he rarely shows his feelings or love for Ezinma, his daughter. It shows that he doesn't want to be emotional like women.

**Conclusion**

The study looks into how gender norms and beliefs play a role in developing a relationship in the novel, as well as how gender roles fall into the traditional realm. It reflects the social reality of women's and men's relationships in society, which is first structured in the unconscious mind. The entire novel was analysed in light of symbolic interaction theory, and thus the novel was examined under four major attributes of symbolic interaction theory. The entire novel was analysed in light
of symbolic interaction theory, and thus the novel was examined under four major attributes of symbolic interaction theory: behaviour characteristics, communication patterns, sources of power, and physical appearance.

The study, on the other hand, discovered that women were treated almost negatively and inferiorly all over the world. Women are oppressed in the novel, whereas men have authority over women. Women are expected to do things for men in every aspect of their lives. Men are shown to be superior to their women in Igbo society and in the novel "Things Fall Apart." Women are exploited in almost every social work in Igbo society and culture. They face discrimination in every aspect of life, including marriage, household, physical roles, society, and employment. The gender roles of men and women are clearly defined. According to the study, women began to behave in the same ways as their male members of the desire depending on the situation.

It was also discovered that women are well informed about the dangers of defying their husbands' wishes. They also believed that they were not being treated; however, they remained calm because they believed that they would be safe from harm and that having children would project a positive image to their peers. As a result, the symbolic meaning of interaction trumps the facts about man's financial responsibilities for the family and to them as the homemaker serving as loving and consoling mothers.

References


