

RELIGIOUS LIFE IN CHINUA ACHEBE'S NOVEL *THINGS FALL APART*

Habibi Habibi, M. Manugeran, Purwarno Purwarno

Faculty of Literature, Universitas Islam Sumatera Utara

Medan, Indonesia

e-mail: habibiselian66@gmail.com

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Abstract

This research is aimed at reflecting how Chinua Achebe reveals the religious life of Igbo people before and after the coming of the missionaries as well as the invasion of British in the southeastern part of Nigeria during the late 19th century. Achebe reflects that various practices of social and religious life are thrilling, cruel and even inhumane. This research is considered significant and worthy since it is an exertion to understand historical knowledge and life lessons about religious life of the local people. This study is supported by the theory of literary sociology proposed by Laurenceon and Swingewood's to understand and evaluate literary works by considering social aspects and holistically conducted by descriptive qualitative method in which the data from the novel are analyzed to reveal the religious life of Igbo people before and after the coming of British people and the significant contributions as well as changes they have brought. The findings of this research designates that various inhumane religious and cultural practices, such as abandoning or throwing twins born into the evil forest, throwing people dying with diseases, mutilating babies who die at birth and considering *ogbanje*, not burying people who die by suicide, surely no longer happen in Igbo society. In short, the changes in religious life carried out by white people bring enlightenment and positive life changes for Igbo people.

Keywords: cultural practices; Igbo people; Nigeria; religious life; social life

1. Introduction

Chinua Achebe, an outstanding Nigerian author, published his debut novel, *Things Fall Apart* in 1958. This novel was written by Chinua Achebe in response to European novels, especially Joseph Conrad's novel entitled *Heart of Darkness* which depicts Africans as savages, and as a "wild, dark, and uncivilized continent" that need to be enlightened by Europeans. Based on the descriptions of Africa and its people by Conrad, it comes as no surprise that Achebe and other African writers began to emerge and tell their story of Africa and its people. Not only was Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* a misrepresentation of Africa, it is also humiliating to its people. It is through the insights of *Things Fall Apart* that the world becomes more appreciative of Africa and its people and at the same time the truth surrounding the stereotypical ideas that once existed about Africa began to appear in a much clearer light.

The bulk of the story in this novel is in the outskirts of Nigeria in a fictional village named Umuofia just before the arrival of white missionaries to the land of the Igbo people. The unexpected arrival of white missionaries in Umuofia, makes many Igbo people bewildered to react to the sudden cultural changes. They are confused whether they could accept a new culture that threatens their social, political, economic, and religious lives.

Achebe presents his readers in *Things Fall Apart* with the history of its nation with the strengths or advantages and also at the same time its imperfections by describing Igbo festivals, gods worshiping and practices in their ritual ceremonies, their rich culture and other social practices, the colonial era that stopped Igbo culture but at the same time also brought some benefits for their culture. Therefore this novel directs the misdirection of European novels that depict Africa as a savage with a new light with the depiction of the Igbo community, and researching the effects of European colonialism on the social structures, particularly on the religious life of Igbo society.

Chinua Achebe in *Things Fall Apart* leads the readers with insight into the life of the Igbo people just before the white missionary invasion of their land. The invasion of colonial powers threatens to change almost every aspect of Igbo society; from social life, politics, religion, traditional gender roles and relations, family structure to trade. In *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe explains the history of Igbo society honestly; he did it by describing the perfection and at the same time the imperfection of the culture and traditions of Igbo society that make them different from Western culture. In the novel, the readers are also made aware of the arrival of white missionaries in Umuofia and Igbo's reaction to their arrival. Even though the arrival of the missionaries has several benefits for the Igbo, there are also a number of challenges faced by Igbo society.

This research was conducted with the aim and focus to analyze the religious life of the Igbo people portrayed in the novel before and after the arrival of British missionaries in Umuofia towards the end of the nineteenth century. In analyzing the religious life of Igbo people in this research, the theory of literary sociology promoted by Laurenceon and Swingewood's (1972) is applied.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Sociology of Literature

Wiyatmi (2013) states that sociology of literature is an approach in literary studies that understands and evaluates literary works by considering social or societal aspects. Based on the definition it can be said that sociology of literature is an attempt to understand literary works through a combination of literature and sociology. In this discourse, literature stands as a societal phenomenon which is studied in the eyes of literature in relation to sociology. Sociology of literature, which understands literary phenomena in relation to social aspects, is an interdisciplinary approach or way of reading and understanding literature that involves sociology.

At the most basic level, that of content, sociology and literature share a similar conspectus. Sociology is essentially the scientific, objective study of man in society, the study of social institutions and of social processes; it seeks to answer the question of how society is possible, how it works, why it persists (Laurenceon and Swingewood, 1972: 11). The social institutions, also known as social structures, cover religion, politics, marriage, economics, education, social changes, etc. in which human beings adapt to and is conditioned of the mechanism of the socialization.

Sociological studies of literature and literary practice seem to have bloomed during the 1970s and crested in the 1980s, with the publication of a collection of essays on the subject (Desan, Ferguson, & Griswold, 1989). Laurenceon and Swingewood (1972) further argue that as with sociology, literature too is pre-eminently concerned with man's social world, his adaptation to it, and his desire to change it. In this respect, novel, which is the major genre of literature in the industrial society, plays important roles as a means of faithful attempt to re-create the social world of man's relation with his family, with friends, with politics, with economics, with religions, with the State, etc. It also outlines its roles in other social structures as in the conflicts and tensions between groups, parties or social classes. In this case, literary works, like sociology, are closely related to social, political, economic and religious aspects of society. If sociology analyses these aspects of life scientifically and objectively, literature conducts a more in-depth analysis to penetrate the deepest recesses of social life and reveal various human experiences with various social problems in social life by using feelings.

Griswold (2000) used novels to explore the impact of production systems on the content of literary work. Her research suggests that British publishers are more likely to publish Nigerian novels with a 'traditional' village theme than those with an urban theme, even though Nigerian novelists write greater numbers of books that focus on contemporary urban social problems. She argues that publishers are selecting books for British and American audiences in this specific way and the impression that these readers have of Nigeria is of rural communities struggling with problems of tradition and modernity. Griswold (2000) and Radway (1991) suggest that there are valid and productive reasons to think sociologically about works of fiction.

In general, sociology of literature is a representation of society in literary texts, and the relationship between literature and other social structures. Sociology of literature theorizes that literature is part of the social system at the time when the literary work was written. It is something valuable because it is believed to be able to help to obtain social aspects, environmental, economic, and political lives through literary studies so that literary researchers or literary critics can use the sociology of literature as a valuable source of knowledge for determining society in terms of the collective structure of human behavior.

Ushie (2008) claims that literature must serve society by steeping itself in politics, by intervention, and writers must not merely write to amuse or to take a bemused, critical look at society. They must play an interventionist role. Literature helps us make meaning social problems and understand everyday events. In addition, literature has an important role in describing social, political and religious lives. It is more than just a creative ornament. It provides the necessary critical perspective on everyday experiences, and educates us about the meaning of our actions and offers us greater control over our social and personal lives.

Therefore, the study of the novel, from the sociological point of view, is relevant since the sociology of novel has been observed to show a deep and important concern for society. There is a rigorous homology between the literary form of the novel and the everyday relation between man and commodities in general, and by extension between men and other men, in a market society. In other words, the novel form can be a literary representative of everyday life of any given society.

From the above description, it can be summed up that the sociology of literature is a method for analyzing literary works based on a sociological perspective to understand social aspects and phenomena in the society in which the literary work is

written. In this research, the life of Igbo people is revealed and analyzed covering social, political, economic and religious aspects before and after the arrival of British colonialism to Nigeria at the end of the 19th century portrayed in the monumental work of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*.

2.2 The Approaches of Sociology of Literature

Laurenson and Swingewood (1972) bring up the theory of the sociology of literature, and state that there are three approaches to dealing with the sociology of literature. The three approaches are literary works as a mirror of the times, the author's social situation, and a specific historical movement.

1. Literary works as a mirror of the times

This approach is related to the time when literary works are created and defined. In this approach it is stated that "literature is a mirror of the times". This shows that readers can discuss social phenomena that occur in society at a certain time and place through literary works. This means that literary works reflect the situation and conditions of social life in society at the time the work is written.

2. Literary works as the author's social situation

In this approach, the writer is influenced by the situations and conditions in which the work is written because the author is also a member of society. This approach is related to the social background of the author and how the author himself reacts and responds to the system that has been built by the community in which he lives. In the literary works produced, the author is always inspired by events that occur in his community. So the writer must be more sensitive to the social phenomena that surround him. This second approach moves from an emphasis on the literary work itself to the production side and especially on the social situation of the author.

3. Literary work as a specific historical moment

This approach is related to the condition of society at a certain time in accepting and understanding a literary work. It reflects the essence and summary of all history. Sociology of the reader tries to explore the ways in which a literary work is actually accepted by certain people at certain historical moments. The work has special issues in history that make it an interesting work.

Based on the description above, the writers decide to apply Laurenson and Swingewood's (1972) concept of the sociological literature as an approach to focus on the research constituting the representation or mirror of the life of the Igbo society in Nigeria before and after the arrival of British colonialism at the end of the 19th century.

2.3 Igbo's Religious Life

It is believed that the Igbo originated in an area about 100 miles north of their current location at the confluence of the Niger and Benue Rivers. They share linguistic ties with their neighbors, the Bini, Igala, Yoruba, and Idoma.

The Igbo people are descended from *Eri*, a divine figure who, according to Igbo folklore, was sent from heaven to begin civilization. Another account presents *Eri* as one of the sons of God who travelled down to establish the present-day Igboland. In Nigeria, Igbos inhabit an area referred to as Igboland, which is divided into two sections along the lower River Niger. They live in most or all parts of five states: Abia,

Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo, as well as minor parts of Delta, Rivers and Benue states. Small Igbo communities are also found in parts of Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea. As a result of the transatlantic slave trade, Igbo people have migrated to other countries including Jamaica, Cuba, Barbados, Belize, the United States among others. Elements of Igbo culture have been found in Jamaican patois—for example the Igbo word ‘unu’ which means ‘you’ is still used, while ‘red Ibo’ or ‘red eboe’ describes a black person with fairer skin (a lighter skin tone is common among Igbos). The area of Belize City is called Eboe Town after its Igbo-descended inhabitants.

As a result of regional and political fragmentation, which is mirrored in the several distinct languages traditionally spoken by the hundreds of different village groups, it would be reductionist to attempt to illustrate the traditional religious practices of the Igbo as a whole. Before the influence of Europeans and Christian missions, however, most Igbo practiced some form of ancestor worship in order to gain success in this world and one must appease of the spirits of the deceased. This might be accomplished in any number of ways. One of the primary ways of showing respect for the dead was through participation in the secret men's society, Mmo, which is the name used only in the northern part of Igbo land. In other parts, similar societies exist under different names. The second level was responsibility for carrying out the funeral ceremonies for the deceased and inducting the departed spirits into the *ebe mmo*, so that they would no longer cause mischief in the village.

2.4 Review of Related Study

A number of researchers have conducted various studies on Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. Some of the previous discussions are related to discussion currently being carried out. However, this research is basically different from the previous researches in terms of discussion, the research approach and also the theory used to analyze the topic. Several studies from previous researchers are presented to show the novelty of this research.

Maliha (2020) carried out her research on Igbo Culture Is Better than European Culture with Reference to *Things Fall Apart*. She claims that in *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe mainly wants to show that their society is not savage or barbaric; rather many good sides are there which could not be understood by the Europeans. The novel mainly represents the values and lifestyle of Igbo society and the effects by the arrival of the Europeans. Though the colonizers try to show the society in wrong way, many critics later on try to show the Igbo culture is better because of its great religious system and beliefs, harmonious judicial system and rich language, all of which contain stories and proverbs. She concludes that Igbo culture is better because it teaches them morality and modesty. Though some of the Igbo people understand that the colonizers are destroying their own entity, most of them accept the colonizers and their culture. They think that the Europeans truly want to civilize them instead of colonizing and destroy their culture.

Nwoye (2011) carried out his research *on Igbo Cultural and Religious Worldview: An insider's perspective*. He states that although it can easily be contended that there is no dearth of ethnographic reports and writings on the Igbo people of Nigeria, yet it can equally be argued that most of such reports, particularly those arising from the works of Christian missionaries and British colonial ethnographers had largely been concerned with giving a general picture of the mores, customs and traditions of the Igbo. The core of such writings often presents the Igbo as primitive people given to some unchanging cultural traits, rather than as argentic people, known for their well-

articulated cultural and religious worldview. In particular, most of the previous anthropological reports on the Igbo arose at those regrettable days of colonial denigrations in which the perspectives of indigenous African peoples were treated with much disdain, with the people themselves being approached as mere informants to be spoken-for rather than to be listened to regarding their views on the nature of life in the human world. Using the technique of documentary analysis and in-depth library research methodology, the paper intends to correct some of the shortfalls embedding most of the previous anthropological reports on the Igbo. In particular, the paper plans to educate the reader on some ideals and ethos of the Igbo of Nigeria. In making this contribution it is not assumed that the reader knows much about the culture of the Igbo. Hence it is expected that at the end of the presentation, a lot should have become clearer regarding Igbo culture and religious worldview as well as the rituals and procedures of the key transitional ceremonies of Igbo religion. He further concludes that the activities of Christian missionaries greatly changed the religious landscape in Igbo land, Nigeria, West Africa just surveyed. However, many of the basic features of the indigenous beliefs and practices of the Igbo have survived to this day. Among these are a number of important transitional ceremonies with strong religious import. This article has attempted to present a sociocultural context and worldview from which scholars, worldwide, interested in Igbo studies could draw for their effective understanding of those four transitional ceremonies popular among the Igbo people of Nigeria, West Africa, namely: the Igbo naming ceremony; the Igbo ceremony of taking-over of a homestead; a component of Igbo marriage ceremony called *Okuku Onye Uwa*; and Igbo burial/funeral rites. These are important transitional ceremonies in Igbo religion, which have, in some parts of the culture area, resisted change because they mark and celebrate the significant changes and closures that take place in each individual's life. They constitute a unique set of definitional ceremonies of Igbo culture and religion because in them, unlike in other forms of transitional ceremonies, both the key individual directly concerned in them as well as the members of his/her community take part in the ceremony. The members of the community participate in them as the "witnessing community" or as "outsider witnesses" and add credibility to the ceremony by their presence. This article serves as an emic introduction to Igbo socio-cultural values and worldview that give background and meaning to the practices and rituals encompassed in such definitional ceremonies of the religion.

Udechukwu (2017) conducted his research on Igbo Cultural Values and the European Influence: *A Way to Redirect the Present Igbo Youths*. He argues that the world is a mystery and very complex to finish its interpretation. As it continues to exist, numerous things and mysterious things manifest day by day. Human beings are made to live and control other things in the world. In different parts of the world, many cultures and belief systems exist. Because of the natural endowment of different regions of the world, there is bound that differences must exist in the way the people think and live their lives. It is therefore not surprised that what one part of the world practices or holds firm may not be the same with other parts of the world. Europeans have their way of life based on their environment and culture and Igbo people also have their own way of life. In living out the life, there are values and norms which help to control peoples' lives and to check the excesses. There are some negative behaviors that are not acceptable in the society. These unacceptable behaviors are called "Taboos". What is seen as taboo in Igbo land may not be seen as taboo in the European countries. It has been observed that some of the Igbo people that have come into contact with Europeans have been

seriously influenced and affected by the culture of the white men in such a way that their own culture has been relegated to the background and this has affected the way they live which in most cases are contrary to the good values and norms Igbo people are known for. It is on this note that the researchers seek to look into some of the Igbo cultural values that have been influenced by the Europeans and their effects on human development. With this, the Igbo people will be able to understand their cultural heritage and will go a long way to preserve and protect them. Descriptive and survey methods of research will be adopted in the course of the research. Further he concludes that Igbo people are blessed with good cultural values. It is these values that our forebears used to live their lives and were able to achieve good human development. These values are still where we left them for modern values. Therefore, if Igbo people will achieve concrete human development in our contemporary society, they should go back to the drawing board, that is, the former good cultural values they have and bring them back into their present way of life; that is, in the way they think, eat, dress, train their children, worship, work etc. It is only then that is done that they will have good human development all round.

Purwarno & Suhendi (2017) conducted their research on *Colonialism as a Redeeming Evil in Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart*. They claim that Colonialism is commonly perceived and portrayed negatively in any discourses and even considered as an evil. This perception is generally connected with the harsh, severe and brutal exploitation of the people and land being colonized. It is related to its historical and cultural denigration, oppression, suppression, economic exploitation and deprivation, literary prejudice and linguistic interference on the side of the colonized. However, apart from the negative impacts due to the colonialism, there is no doubt at all that it has brought some certain positive impacts for the colonized. Colonizers have civilized huge numbers of people by spreading enlightenment, knowledge, information, technology, and even a love of learning all over the globe. It is while governing the indigenous people, they civilize them. This study aims at critically studying on the colonialism as a redeeming evil in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. It highlights the enlightenment, progress and divergent developments brought by colonialism to the Nigerian Igbo. The research result shows that colonialism has brought some positive impacts and undeniable landmark achievements to the Igbo in terms of establishment of religion, building of churches, schools, hospitals, courts, government, trade and commerce, the acceptance of outcasts, the stoppage of the killing of twins, that have made it a necessary redeeming evil, and even a blessing in disguise. It also reveals that Chinua Achebe actually acknowledges that colonialism has brought positive impacts to the Nigerian Igbo. The method used in this research is descriptive research proposed by Kothari (2004). Further they conclude that indisputably, colonialism has positive effects to the Igbo people and should not be overlooked. Chinua Achebe in *Things Fall Apart* acknowledges that Igbo people have imperfections in some certain aspects of their life. Despite a great number of crimes and sins against the indigenous people, colonialism play a significant role as an agent of social enlightenment and change, beacon of light and development, bringer of freedom for the oppressed, and hope for the desperate and the disillusioned in the society. This research reveals that colonialism has brought a number of positive impacts to the indigenous people, such as establishment of religion, building of churches, schools, hospitals, courts, government, trade and commerce, the acceptance of outcasts, the stoppage of the killing of twins that make colonialism deserve to be called as a redeeming evil.

3. Research Method

This research is designed to obtain the answers of the religious life of Igbo people in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. The method used in this study is structural analytical to start with reviewing literary research to provide research data. The data are carefully examined and analyzed to reach the objectives of this research. This research is conducted by using descriptive qualitative research with text analysis design. The object in this research is a novel entitled *Things Fall Apart* written by Chinua Achebe. All the words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs related to the topic of discussion are the sources of the data. The sources of data were divided into two parts; primary sources and supporting sources. The primary source is Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, taken from Bloom's *Modern Critical Interpretations* edited with an introduction by Harold Bloom published in 2010 with 221 pages. The secondary sources are books, theses, articles from the journals and proceedings. In collecting the data, the researchers used the documentation method and note techniques. The analysis technique used in this research is in the form of content analysis. After the data are collected, the researchers analyze the data using descriptive method, collecting the data that have been obtained, interpreting, and analyzing them interpretatively. Thus, this research focuses only on text in the novel *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe by applying the theory of sociology of literature proposed by Laurenceon and Swingewood (1972).

4. Discussion

Human faith in different spiritual powers is regarded as religion which also includes spiritual customs and traditions relating to gods and goddesses. Igbo people also believe that one must have faith in one's ancestors to be blessed with good health, good luck, and many children. Achebe in *Things Fall Apart* depicts religious beliefs of the Igbo people in detail. Deep study of the novel reveals that Igbo people do not act contrary to the customs and traditions prevailing in their societies. Every man of the clan is well aware of the ill consequences if he violates the rules of the conduct as provided for in their religious scriptures. The religion of Igbo people is based on two forms of religion, i.e. higher and lower. The belief in the supremacy of God is termed a higher form of religion and the faith in the existence of other gods and goddesses is regarded as lower term. Besides, Igbo people believe in the worship of the smaller gods, who according to them control anything. Therefore, they worship them to be flourished in their lives and also to be saved from facing calamities. The gods and goddesses whom Igbo people worship are Oracles, Chukwu (the supreme power), Ani (the earth goddess), Chi, and Ekwensu.

The religion of the Igbo people has a powerful influence on their life. Violation of the rules of conduct as provided for in their religion is treated as a nice endangering to the existence of the whole clan. Igbo people believe in the supremacy of one God whom they call *Chukwu*. They have belief in many gods and goddesses, oracles, evil spirits, priesthood, medicine men, magic, etc. In spite of certain traditional evils like throwing of infant twins, killing of innocent boy like Ekemefuna for other's fault, throwing of people suffering from serious illness into Evil Forest to rot and die, and banning of burial by the clansmen of the dead bodies of the men (like Okonkwo) who die due to committing suicide even for a great cause, Ibo people are happy with their religious life. When Okonkwo's dead body is dangling from a branch of a tree, Obierika says:

"We cannot bury him. Only strangers can. We shall pay your men to do it. When he has been buried we will then do our duty by him. We shall make sacrifices to cleanse the desecrated land." Obierika, who had been gazing steadily at his friend's dangling body, turned suddenly to the District Commissioner and said ferociously: "That man was one of the greatest men in Umuofia. You drove him to kill himself and now he will be buried like a dog..." He could not say any more. His voice trembled and choked his words (Achebe, 1995: 68)

External forces step into the Igbo villages and begin to create havoc in their happy life. At first, the missionaries appear and they build their churches in different villages. They propagate the gospels of Christianity and gradually attract a huge number of Igbo people to their religion. The number of converts goes on increasing day-by-day. Thus, the missionary factor is successful in dividing the Igbo people among themselves. The converts turn bitter enemies of their brothers, and the conflict between the two has become a matter of routine. In this context, Obrieka remarks:

"Our own men and sons have joined the ranks of stranger. They have joined his religion and they help to uphold his government." "How do you think we can fight when our own brothers have turned against us." (Achebe, 1995: 57)

Mr. Smith's strictness adds much to the bitterness between converts and non-converts. His policies turn the upside down and disturb the peaceful life of the Igbo people. He sees things black and white, calls Igbo people the sons of darkness, believe in slaying the prophets of Igbo people. He criticizes the policies of Mr. Brown, the previous missionary who he has succeeded, who has worked and converted the Igbo people into Christianity without harming anyone.

As soon as the missionaries begin teaching the tribal people about the religion that is the Christian faith, their tribal customs begin to be questioned. This create a sense of unrest in the village. The missionaries try to bring about a new way of life, and mostly a better way of life. Achebe tries to show us that missionaries are showing people who are hurt by tribal beliefs that this does not have to happen in their religion. This is one of the main reasons people turn to their religion.

Achebe also shows us that the Igbo people have many dangerous beliefs before the missionaries come. Igbo people believe that twins are evil and should be discarded as soon as they are born. They believe that sacrifice is a good way to bring peace. Although at the beginning of the introduction of Christianity to the Igbo people by the White Missionaries, the Igbo people think that it is a crazy religion, but gradually many Igbo people are willing to join the religion because they eventually realize that some of the customs prevailing in their society are irrational as well as evil practices. Gradually many Igbo people begin to question the evil practices in their society, such as throwing twins as the earth goddess has decreed. The earth goddess has ordained that the twins:

were an offence on the land and must be destroyed. And if the clan did not exact punishment for an offence against the great goddess, her wrath was loosed on all the land and not just on the offender. (Achebe, 1995: 41)

The excerpt above shows that the Igbo people consider twins a trespass on the ground so the Igbo people kill twins out of great fear of the wrath of the earth goddess. When twins are born then their parents have to leave them in the "Evil Forest" to die.

Nwoye and Obierika, two of the main characters in the novel, think of the twins who have just been thrown after they are born. They wonder why the newborn twins have to be thrown into the Evil Forest and what the sin of the newly born twins is that they have to be thrown into the forest to die there.

Nwoye and her friends on their way home from the farm and crossing the outskirts of the Evil Forest across the river hear a baby crying in the forest.

Nwoye had heard that twins were put in earthenware pots and thrown away in the Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* Page 19 forest, but he had never yet come across them. A vague chill had descended on him and his head had seemed to swell, like a solitary walker at night who passes an evil spirit on the way. Then something had given way inside him. It descended on him again, this feeling, when his father walked in that night after killing Ikemefuna (Achebe, 1995, p. 19-20).

In addition, Obierika is also carried away in a greater complexity about the evil practices that prevail in his society, but he does not find the answer to it. He is shocked with grief when "he remembered his wife's twin children, whom he had thrown away. What crime had they committed?" (Achebe, 1995: 41).

Throwing newborn twins into the Evil Forest to die is certainly an inhumane practice because twins come from the same zygote and form two embryos, and not as a bad omen sent by the gods or as supernatural beings that could bring about destruction or disaster to society as the Igbo believe.

Igbo people are also superstitious in believing that *ogbanje*, children who die at birth and are believed to be evil children, will enter their mother's womb to be born again. They believe that *Ogbanje* is the embodiment of an evil spirit who deliberately comes to disturb a family by causing misfortune. Every time, a newborn child thought to be *Ogbanje* die, would be mutilated.

The medicine man then ordered that there should be no mourning for the dead child. He brought out a sharp razor from the goatskin bag slung from his left shoulder and began to mutilate the child. Then he took it away to bury in the Evil Forest, holding it by the ankle and dragging it on the ground behind him (Achebe, 1995: 26).

The practice of throwing twins at birth into the Evil Forest and abandoning them there to die and the mutilation of the corpses of newborn babies which are considered *ogbanje* are inhumane, cruel and horrific practices. That is the cultural religious belief of the Igbo people before the white people introduce Christianity to them. After white people introduce Christianity to Igbos, and forbid Igbos to abandon newborn twins, the practice of abandoning newborn twins gradually diminish and eventually the practice ceases to exist. The religion brought by the white people welcomes the newborn twins. The missionaries rescue the twins who are banished in the Evil Forest. The missionaries' humane concern for the twins quickly spread to other villages and villages so that the women who have given birth to twins come to join the new religion. Of course, it is very difficult to imagine how broken the hearts of mothers and fathers are, whose twin babies must be snatched from their arms and thrown into the forest. But now they feel

relieved and comfortable because the new religion brought by the white people, actually forbids the practice of banishing newborn twins to the Evil Forest.

Igbo people also believe that "evil forest was, ..., alive with sinister forces and powers of darkness" (Achebe, 1995: 49). That is the reason why they give land for the white people to build their homes in the Evil Forest because they believe that the missionaries would die within four days. However what the Igbo people believe does not come true because white people remain healthy and living in the Evil Forest. After the fourth day, not a single white person dies. The white people convince the Igbos that the Evil Forest is just an ordinary forest that has neither evil nor the power of darkness. Gradually, Igbo people begin to accept the truth instead of superstition. The Ibo religious culture begins to crumble.

The Igbo people also have a superstitious practice of an Igbo who dies on Week of Peace, a week before the planting season which the Igbos commemorate in honor of the goddess of the earth. The Igbo people believe that it is an abomination for a man to die during Week of Peace so that they would not bury the body of the dead on Week of Peace but instead will throw it into the Evil Forest.

‘... in some clans it is an abomination for a man to die during the Week of Peace.’

‘It is indeed true,’ said Ogbuefi Ezeudu. ‘They have that custom in Obodoani. If a man dies at this time, he is not buried but cast into the Evil Forest (Achebe, 1995: 9).

In addition, if an Igbo suffers from swelling in the stomach and or other limbs, he is not allowed to die in the house. He will be taken to the Evil Forest to die and rot there. The Igbo people believe that such disease is an abomination to the earth goddess; therefore, the victim will not be given a proper burial. An Igbo native named Unoka suffers from swelling in his stomach and other limbs that it is considered an abomination to the earth goddess. When Unoka is dying the Igbo people take Unoka to the Evil Forest to die and rot there. Unoka is not allowed to have a proper burial.

Unoka was an ill-fated man. He had a bad chi or personal god, and evil fortune followed him to the grave, or rather to his death, for he had no grave. He died of the swelling which was an abomination to the earth goddess. When a man was afflicted with swelling in the stomach and the limbs he was not allowed to die in the house. He was carried to the Evil Forest and left there to die. There was the story of a very stubborn man who staggered back to his house and had to be carried again to the forest and tied to a tree. The sickness was an abomination to the earth, and so the victim could not be buried in her bowels. He died and rotted away above the earth, and was not given the first or the second burial. Such was Unoka's fate (Achebe, 1995:5).

Such a practice is utterly inhumane. It is inconceivable how a human who is still breathing is tied to a tree in a dense forest to die and rot there without being buried. This is done by the Igbo people because they believe that the disease suffered by that person is an abomination of the earth goddess. In fact, the man is suffering from a disease such as leprosy or smallpox.

Suicide is also considered an abomination to the earth goddess. Igbo people believe that the earth goddess will be angry if an Igbo dies of suicide and is buried

properly. Therefore Igbo people, who die by suicide, will not get a proper burial, even Igbo people are not allowed to touch their bodies. In the novel it is described that Okonkwo has killed one of the white men, and to avoid the disgrace of being executed under the white men's law, he commits suicide. When his relatives find his body hanging, they refuse to touch him, and instead ask the white men to take his body and bury it. When asked why, one of them explains:

“It is against our custom. It is an abomination for a man to take his own life. It is an offence against the Earth, and a man who commits it will not be buried by his clansmen. His body is evil, and only strangers may touch it.” (Achebe, 1995: 68).

The quotation above shows that Okonkwo's corpse hanging from a tree branch cannot be touched by his own people. The Igbo people believe that if they do it, the earth goddess will be angry with them. Therefore only foreigners can touch and bury his corpse so they ask the white man to take him down and bury him. The belief in the earth goddess's wrath if they touch and bury their relatives who die by suicide in a proper way is certainly irrational and inhumane.

When someone kills another person, of course that person must get the punishment, and he deserves the punishment for his action. It is certainly a fair law. However, it becomes irrational and unfair if the punishment is not only given to the perpetrator but also to all members of his family; such as against his wives, children, property and animals. This related data can be found in the novel where the first character of the novel, Okonkwo accidentally kills a clan member. As a result of Okonkwo's action, according to the law in force in his village, Umuofia, Okonkwo has to be exiled from his village for seven years. However it is not Okonkwo alone who has to bear the punishment. All his family members; wives and children, have to bear the punishment for seven years. In addition, his houses are burned, his barns and property destroyed and his animals killed. Igbo people do such treatment to Okonkwo merely based on their belief that it is a justice for the earth goddess.

As soon as the day broke, a large crowd of men from Ezeudu's quarter stormed Okonkwo's compound, dressed in garbs of war. They set fire to his houses, demolished his red walls, killed his animals and destroyed his barn. It was the justice of the earth goddess, and they were merely her messengers (Achebe, 1995: 41).

The punishment that Okonkwo and his family members have received is completely irrational and incomprehensible. Moreover, the murder committed by Okonkwo is completely unintentional. The Igbo people claim that they are just messengers of the earth goddess and what they have done is justice of the earth goddess.

5. Conclusion

Based on the results of the discussion and findings regarding Igbo life in Chinua Achebe's novel entitled *Things Fall Apart*, there are several conclusions that can be drawn. The social, political, economic and religious life of the Igbo people in Chinua Achebe's novel entitled *Things Fall Apart* is vividly described by Achebe. Despite the limitations of the Igbo people to modern life outside their area and by various practices of religious life which according to external points of views, their customs are

considered extreme, cruel and even inhumane; however the Igbo people feel contented with their life.

Igbo people have no problem with the traditional life they lead. The presence of white people, the British, in the Igbo society brings significant changes to the religious life of the Igbo people. The religious reforms introduced by the white people make the life of the Igbo people also significantly changed. Of course, these changes receive various responses in the Igbo community. However, in general, the changes brought about by white people have changed the religious life systems of the Igbo people. Igbo people, who previously have various beliefs in their various cultural religions, are introduced to Christianity. Various evil practices related to their cultural religious beliefs that are previously seen as cruel and inhumane by outsiders, such as abandoning or throwing twins born into the evil forest, throwing people who are dying with swelling in their body parts into the evil forest, mutilating babies who die at birth and are considered *ogbanje*, are slowly but surely no longer occurring in Igbo society. In short, the changes in religious life carried by white people have brought enlightenment and a better life for Igbo people.

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