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Disadvantageous Authority in *Things Fall Apart*

Throughout its billions of years in existence, planet Earth has long shuffled authority. From sedentary stromatolites to colossal dinosaurs, humans have only recently become the dominant species. This phenomenon is prominent in *Things Fall Apart*, a novel written by acclaimed author Chinua Achebe. Achebe's counter-narrative revolves around the European colonization of the African continent. The text introduces an accomplished protagonist, Okonkwo, comparing him to various inferior individuals. Okonkwo's achievements cement his status as a powerful figure. However, as the story advances, it becomes evident that his influence fills him with arrogance. Okonkwo's newfound conceit positions him in a variety of disturbing situations, notably his tragic suicide. As unearthed in *Things Fall Apart*, the illusion of authority yields consequential egotism.

Headlined by the protagonist, Okonkwo, the novel swiftly constructs a social hierarchy. Garnering fame from wrestling competitions among the Igbo tribe in Nigeria, Okonkwo is immediately presented as a decorated man. Gradually, it becomes evident that the granted authority creates his arrogant personality. For instance, he develops an ill temper due to his perception of superiority. His intimidating physicality ruins family dynamics, as "...whenever he was angry and could not get his words out quickly enough, he would use his fists. He had no patience with unsuccessful men. He had had no patience with his father" (Achebe PDF 3).

Essentially, Okonkwo reckons that to retain his triumph, he must usurp others with his strength. His consistently reckless emotions show his horrid attitude, one full of arrogance and inconsideration for others. In addition, Okonkwo's egotism leads to tragic results. When Ikemefuna, his adopted son, is selected for human sacrifice, Okonkwo is explicitly instructed to remain a bystander. However, for the sake of his pride, he murders Ikemefuna. After the initial yelp from Ikemefuna, "Okonkwo drew his machete and cut him down. He was afraid of being thought weak" (Achebe PDF 27). Achebe previously describes Okonkwo as affectionate of Ikemefuna yet unwilling to display his fondness. Okonkwo's illusion of superiority drives him to murder his beloved adopted son just to appear powerful. Worse, Ikemefuna lingers in his thoughts days after, and despite his emotionless appearance, it upsets Okonkwo tremendously. Okonkwo's egotism consequently corrodes his family, and the root of his egotism is his authority.

European colonization of the African continent is also explored in *Things Fall Apart*. With the addition of power, arrogance among European settlers develops throughout the span of Part Two. When Christian missionaries first arrive to Igboland, villagers are initially perplexed. The missionaries begin gently, preaching their Christian ideologies to the Igbo people with compromises. Mr. Brown, the leading missionary, is depicted as a kindred individual in encounters with Igbo natives. He "...learned a good deal about the religion of the clan and he came to the conclusion that a frontal attack on it would not succeed" (Achebe PDF 75). He reasons with the villagers, negotiating and supplying them with resources such as education and medical aid. This tranquil approach is deceptively powerful, converting a troubling number of residents to Christianity. Mr. Brown's compassion collects praise from Igbo tribes later as well. However, with the gain of power, the European settlers become egotistical. Due to declining

health, Mr. Brown is replaced by Reverend James Smith. Mr. Smith establishes himself as a staunch character, attempting to gain more power from that created prior to his rule. However, he is quite stubborn even among the missionaries, condemning "... openly Mr. Brown's policy of compromise and accommodation" (Achebe PDF 76). Consequently, his arrogance results in rebellion from Umuofia. Villagers commit arson against the Christian church, infuriating the missionaries. As the European settlers gain power, they begin to consider themselves superior to the Africans in Igboland. The modest, feeble missionaries become voracious, egotistical colonists.

Egotism leads to devastating consequences. At the beginning of the novel, Achebe introduces Okonkwo as an egocentric protagonist fueled by his power and influence. However, by the conclusion, he begins to lose authority as Umuofia has evolved beyond him. Attempting to reclaim control, masqueraders destroy the Christian church, pleasing Okonkwo. Once they succeed, the Christian missionaries arrest Okonkwo and Umuofia's leaders, imprisoning and humiliating them. While detained, "the six men ate nothing throughout that day and the next. They were not even given any water to drink, and they could not go out to urinate or go into the bush when they were pressed. At night the messengers came in to taunt them and to knock their shaven heads together" (Achebe PDF 80). Upon discovering Umuofia's opposition to war with the missionaries, Okonkwo commits suicide. Umuofia refuses to touch his carcass afterward as it is deemed culturally intolerable. As one man explains, "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 PDF 85). One of the most respectable individuals of Umuofia becomes a tarnished carcass forbidden from contact.

Okonkwo's constant desire for authority is thus unfulfilled, leading to tremendous arrogance, catastrophic consequences – and a tragic outcome.

Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is a tale regarding the arrogance of perceived power. Achebe paints a magnificent counter-narrative on the African perspective of European colonization. Although they may consider each other glaringly distinct, Okonkwo and the Christian missionaries collectively demonstrate authority leading one to view themselves as superior. Disturbing results emerge from the perception of superiority. Okonkwo may have suffered such consequences, but on Earth, one aspect remains constant: the cycle of power continues to flux.

Works Cited

Achebe, Chinua. *Things Fall Apart*. Penguin Publishing Group, 2019.