Eastern Nigeria at The Crossroads of Culture

Cultural Hybridity in Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the four initial stages in the process of cultural hybridization as put forward by Chan Kwok-bun in his book *Cultural Hybridity*: essentializing, alternating, converting and hybridizing. These stages are examined in Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* through a mapping to show how a cultural hybrid is formed. This analysis is done by using the three phases of colonialism as a framework: pre-colonialism, colonialism itself and post-colonialism. Using theories of postcolonialism, we break down the concept of hybridization: from domination to alienation and all the shades in between. The study attempts to shed light on aspects of colonialism by giving it a wider scope showing the process of cultural hybridization through a series of stages.
Introduction

“Named for Victoria, Queen of England” is an extract from a series of letters, published by postcolonial writer Chinua Achebe in 1973. The essay addresses the theme of colonialism: “The Nationalist movement in British West Africa after the Second World War brought about a mental revolution which began to reconcile us to ourselves. It suddenly seemed we too might have a story to tell” (Achebe 145). He felt a call towards sharing a message at a tumultuous time in history where narratives could convey thoughts and feelings: “We lived at the crossroads of cultures. We still do today” (Ashcroft et al. 143). These words of Chinua Achebe set the scene for the discussion in this paper, namely, one about cultural hybridity in the novel *Things Fall Apart*. By using a postcolonial approach, a framework based upon four stages towards hybridity presented in Chan Kwok-bun’s book *Cultural Hybridity* will be highlighted. In his book, Chan Kwok-bun addresses the different layers of interaction when two cultures meet. The author segments the stages towards cultural hybridity by giving different names to them: essentializing, alternating, converting and hybridizing. These stages will be analyzed using a close reading of Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*. To create a background for the discussion, some key notions will be explained, namely, colonialism, imperialism, hybridity and last but not least postcolonialism.

In his book *Beginning Colonialism*, McLeod highlights the interchangeability which generally occurs when using both terms: colonialism and imperialism. He defines colonialism as ‘the settlement of one group of people in a new location’ and as a ‘historical manifestation of imperialism specific to certain places and times’ (8). He also explains it as being a ‘settlement of territory, the exploitation or development of resources, and the attempt to govern’ (8). Imperialism, according to the same source, is ‘an ideological concept which upholds the legitimacy of the economic and military
control of one nation by another’ (7). Mc Leod goes on to state that colonialism results from the ideology of imperialism and that imperialism continues when colonialism has ended. Moreover, both imperialism and colonialism are associated with subjugation in one form or the other. In *Things Fall Apart*, the white man colonizes the African, who becomes his subaltern. The subjugation of the colonized is one of the phases towards the creation of a cultural hybrid. In an interview with Homi Bhabha carried out by Jonathan Rutherford about what he describes as ‘The Third Space’, Bhabha states that “The process of cultural hybridity gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation” (211). This is one of the most important definitions of hybridity since it highlights the different nature of the ‘hybrid’ and shows that there is an originality to each ‘hybrid’ since many factors come together in relation to its creation and formation.

Chinua Achebe uses the voice of a postcolonial writer with a powerful narrative style providing us with a platform for the analysis in this essay. The novel is divided in three parts whereby the first part deals with the life of the villagers with their rooted traditions. They have their routines and social codes. “The women had gone to the bush to collect firewood and the little children to visit their playmates in the neighbouring compounds” (Achebe 55). Okonkwo, the protagonist is a respected man in the village. “Okonkwo was clearly cut out for great things” (Achebe 8). Later, in the second part of the novel, there is a new presence in the village: a white man. “He was not an albino. He was quite different” (Achebe 138). “The elders consulted their Oracle and it told them that the strange man would break their clan and spread destruction among them” (Achebe 138). There was a rumour that more white men were on their way. A wave of colonialism enters the village and change is brought about as this wave gains momentum. “The Christians had grown in number and were now a small community of men, women and children, self-assured and confident” (Achebe 159). During this time
of change, Okonkwo is in exile. “The seven wasted and weary years were at last dragging to a close” (Achebe 162). This shows the passing of time and there is a note of nostalgia in the words “And so he regretted every day of his exile” (Achebe 162). The third part relates the scope of the change brought about in the village. “Umuofia had indeed changed during the seven years Okonkwo had been in exile. The church had come and led many astray” (Achebe 174). “But apart from the church, the white man had also brought a government” (Achebe 174). The situation escalates at the end and the villagers revolt. “If we fight the stranger we shall hit our brothers and perhaps shed the blood of a clansman. But we must do it” (Achebe 203). The change, the passing of time, the introduction of a new religion, language as well as a new government are amongst the elements that provide this study with notions of cultural hybridity.

Hybridity is the bringing together of two cultures, and it exists in many forms: cultural, linguistic, racial, religious, political and literary to name some of the most common. Hybridity is a recurrent theme in postcolonial discourse. It “lays emphasis on the survival…of the distinctive aspects of the culture of the oppressed, and shows how these become an integral part of the new formations which arise from the clash of cultures” (Ashcroft et al. 137). It is of utmost importance to understand the writers of the post-colonial age since they tend to highlight the domination of the colonizer. Those who are oppressed exist as victims and are portrayed in a way that strips them of their dignity and humanity. Cultures do not only clash as stipulated in the above quotation. This essay will argue that the interaction between the two parties does not solely lead to conflicts. There is an element of dynamism in cultural manifestation which resembles the movement of waves, sometimes existing, at other times rising in intensity and oftentimes retreating. When moving to new countries, people carry with them the values and traditions from their country of origin. The blend between these two cultures is
called cultural hybridity, a concept that has been analyzed from numerous angles. It is at
the heart of postcolonial studies and has a historical as well as a contemporary bearing.

Chinua Achebe describes the effect of colonialism from the perspective of the
colonized; hence a reading of *Things Fall Apart* opens new ways of viewing cultural
hybridity. In many works about postcolonial literature, the focus has been either on the
new cultural identity or the lamenting of the lost identity. Derek Walcott describes these
“...two great worlds, like the halves of a fruit seamed by its own bitter juice, that exiled
from your own Eden’s you have placed me in the wonder of another, and that was my
inheritance and your gift” (Walcott 332). There is a note of positivity in this quotation,
almost a gratitude and tribute intermingled with a hidden sense of bitterness. This is a
perfect example of hybridity in postcolonial writing.

Moreover, the concept of postcolonialism is related to the ‘shared history of
colonial exploitation’. There is a cultural legacy that comes from colonialism and
imperialism and postcolonialism deals with the human consequences associated with
keeping the colonized people in subservience. This means that there is no singular
definition of postcolonialism. The literature produced by writers from postcolonial
nations such as India, Australia and Canada amongst others is varied and presented in
multiple ways. At the heart of postcolonial literature is the cultural specificity of the
writers and this can be viewed and understood differently by different critics.

First and foremost, it is relevant to mention that Achebe’s intentions have given
rise to interpretations. One of the critics who caught Achebe’s attention after the
publication of his novel was Honor Tracy. She was a literary critic and a journalist, and
she wrote an article in which she questioned Achebe’s reason for writing the novel
*Things Fall Apart*. Achebe quotes her words in his essay about ‘Colonial Criticism’
published in 1974: “How would novelist Achebe like to go back to the mindless times
of his grandfather instead of holding the modern job he has in broadcasting in Lagos?”
Achebe stated that he would never forget her comments, and he attempted to answer her in his essay: “There are three principal parts here: Africa's inglorious past (raffia skirts) to which Europe brings the blessing of civilization (Achebe's modern job in Lagos) and for which Africa returns ingratitude (sceptical novels like Things Fall Apart)” (Ashcroft et al. 137). The three principal parts referred to are the era before, during and after colonialism. Chinua Achebe breaks down his understanding of imperialism and this has a great relevance in the study of cultural hybridity. Each stage has had its influence, be it on the author or on his writing.

Furthermore, another critic whose work is relevant is Eustace Palmer, who has written: “Okonkwo is what his society has made him(...)If he is plagued by fear of failure and of weakness it is because his society puts such a premium on success; if he is obsessed by status(…)” (Morrison 12). Palmer argues that man is shaped by his environment. He additionally highlights the element of the timing of Okonkwo’s exile with the arrival of the colonizer. In this sense, Palmer’s criticism is relevant because he brings to attention circumstances that help the understanding of change within an individual character. The concept of change is a key factor in the existence of cultural hybridity. In the plot of Things Fall Apart part of the change which takes place is related to the social environment.

Things Fall Apart was published in 1958 as a response to Conrad’s Heart of Darkness. This was a new experience in the world of literature: the first African novel to be written in English by a postcolonial writer. Achebe’s approach to the themes of his novel was unique in the sense that he portrayed the Nigerian with a strong touch of humanity. An interesting point of discussion is the way in which cultural hybridization as described by the author Chan Kwok-bun can be applied to the novel. The following quotation from the book Cultural Hybridity discusses the space ‘in-between’ or the Third Space (Bhabha 156) which is a crucial part in the meeting of cultures in the state.
of Hong-Kong. “All too often, we are told, postcolonialism has preoccupied itself with subalternity, injustice, and violence, while ignoring the ways in which cultures have engaged in reciprocally transformative creative practices over the century” (Kwok-bun 14).

Chan Kwok-bun is concerned about the engagement between cultures, which is a key point in this study. Chan Kwok-Bun mentions five different stages of cultural hybridization in a society in his book: ‘essentializing’, ‘alternating’, ‘converting’, ‘hybridizing’ and ‘innovating’. The first four are relevant to this study. In one sense, Kwok-bun’s theories are conceptualized within the domain of Chinese hybridity but his four-part progression mentioned above is useful when attempting to dissect the stages towards cultural hybridization. It unlocks the precise mechanics whereby a postcolonial subject is constructed as a cultural hybrid. A reading of *Things Fall Apart* in three major parts would provide the framework for the analysis. The essay will argue that *Things Fall Apart* documents the way in which a subject transits between the different steps towards cultural hybridity. The first stage, ‘essentializing’, will highlight the idea of difference of identity and corresponds to the first part of the novel: the era of pre-colonialism. The second stage will preoccupy itself with the intermingling and the dominance of one identity over another: the era of colonialism in two stages, namely ‘alternating’ and ‘converting’. This stage will be linked to a major part of the novel which we will classify as the second part, namely the tragedy surrounding Okonkwo as he makes his way into exile while many villagers convert to the religion of the colonizer. The third stage is “hybridization”, and this will be highlighted during the era of postcolonialism in the third part of the novel when Okonkwo returns from his exile to confront the aftermath of colonization.
Hybridization and Postcolonial Criticism

Before exploring the theories of Kwok-bun’s used in this essay, it is appropriate to examine some background information about Hybridization and Postcolonial Criticism. Homi Bhabha explains in *Signs Taken for Wonders* that the theory of ‘Hybridization’ is based upon the idea of ‘radical difference’. His belief is that there is no absolute colonialist authority and he highlights the distinction between the ‘mother culture and alien cultures’. Through cultural interaction, a new platform emerges: a ‘hybrid’. Bhabha goes further and defines hybridity in the same extract as “the sign of the productivity of colonial power, its shifting forces and fixities” (Bhabha 42). What this quotation proves is that with hybridity comes an assessment of the value of colonized identity in relation to the identity of the colonized.

Moreover, post-colonial theories emerged from the encounter between the colonizer and the colonized. The theory mentions “the vibrant and powerful mixture of imperial language and local experience” (Ashcroft et al. 1). Chinua Achebe took the approach of telling his tale from the point of view of the African, hence giving an originality of approach to the way in which post-colonial literature at that time was manifesting itself. The literature of post-colonialism reflects the interaction between these two groups of people. As Ashcroft emphasizes “Post-colonialism addresses all aspects of the colonial process from the beginning of colonial contact” (Ashcroft et al. 1). This quotation has a great significance in the analysis of the different stages of colonialism as presented by Chan Kwok-bun.

The term ‘hybridity’ has been used extensively in postcolonial theory and criticism in recent decades. The French ‘métissage’ is a term also used in English to designate the same, i.e. hybridization. Two prominent theorists in this regard are Francoise Lionnet and Francoise Verges. The term ‘postcolonial’ depicts “all the culture
affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day (Ashcroft et al. 2). When there is a colonial encounter, there is bound to be a meeting of the colonizer’s culture with the culture of the colonized. Cultural difference is a key factor for the prevailing of hybrid cultural identity. This is what Chan Kwok-bun labels ‘essentializing’.

Pre-colonialism: Essentializing

In his discussion of the stage called ‘essentializing’, Chan Kwok-bun points out the fact that the two entities engage in a process of “retreating to their respective ‘unchanging same’”. He goes on to emphasize the “encounters with difference or differentness” (140). A historical mapping-out becomes very natural in this study about identities: whether existing, changing or reconstructed, Identities are what lie at the source of cultural hybridity. Identities alter, they adapt, and they are born again. Hence the introduction of the pre-colonial period as a setting is suitable for the investigation of this first stage of ‘essentializing’. Homi Bhabha emphasizes this notion of cultures and their coexistence: “Even as much of what we do not recognize as culture was produced by the colonial encounter, the concept itself was in part invented because of it. Culture was also produced out of the allied network of processes that spawned nations in the first place” (Ashcroft et al. 58). This quotation is central to the study provided in this paper. It is related to the discussion of the coexistence of cultures. This chapter will discuss the value of the pre-colonial era to understand the culture and identity of the indigenous population. By doing so, the difference of the indigenous population is clearly specified. This is one of the first stages towards hybridization as per our discussion.

The opening chapters of Things Fall Apart take us on a journey into the heart and minds of the traditional Igbo society. The novel is remarkable for its focus on the
rarely portrayed African perspective compared to the abundant perspective of “the white man” in colonized Africa of the twentieth century. Okonkwo is a man of great repute. His fame and success are clearly spelled out: “If ever a man deserved his success, that man was Okonkwo. At an early age he had achieved fame as the greatest wrestler in all the land” (Achebe 27). The novel shows the downfall of a man from fame to shame. Alongside with belonging to an era, there is a clear demarcation in the different parts of the novel as mentioned in the introduction. During this period of pre-colonization, Okonkwo not only rises in status, but he also makes mistakes that cause him to have to leave his village and go back to Mbanta, his motherland. He is the typical east Nigerian with the values strongly imparted to him by his ancestors. He works hard and fears failure: “But his whole life was dominated by fear, the fear of failure and of weakness (...). It was not external but lay deep within himself” (Achebe, 13). Okonkwo lives his life by the rigorous ethical code of his community, which is at the core of its culture. The society of Okonkwo has its own values: “And when a man is at peace with his gods and his ancestors, his harvest will be good or bad according to the strength of his arm” (Achebe, 17). This traditional society has an existence of its own in a pre-colonial era. In the stage of ‘essentializing’, the existence of the African as an entity before the encounter with the White Man is very important.

In the first pages of the novel Things Fall Apart, the narrator describes the heritage and the identity of the African before the arrival of the colonizer. This era is the pre-colonial era. The Westerners meet a way of life that is totally different from their own. In the village, there is a group of elders who share decision making in order to secure a functioning and peaceful community. It is essential to point out here that the white man appears late in the novel and this gives Achebe the opportunity to elaborate on the traditions and existing culture. “The elders, or ndichie, met to hear a report of Okonkwo’s mission. At the end they decided as everybody knew they would, that the
girl should go to Ogbuefi Udo to replace his murdered wife. As for the boy, he belonged to the clan as a whole, and there was no hurry to decide his fate” (Achebe, 12). This quotation further highlights the customs and traditions present in the village of Umuofia. There is a revered presence and it is that of the elders. Their decisions were not questioned by other tribal members. Hence, by creating a picture of this existing village with its traditions, Chinua Achebe provides a platform for the idea of ‘essentializing’. The colonized live a fulfilled life and are ruled by the laws that are defined by the culture they come from. There must be an idea of difference in order to see the clash of a colonial encounter and to examine the awakening of a hybrid identity. This is a key point chosen by Chinua Achebe as he presents a picture of Africa unlike the one presented by his predecessors. There is an emphasis on well-defined and rooted traditions: “They all wore smoked raffia skirts and their bodies were painted with chalk and charcoal” (Achebe 91)

Moreover, the narrative of the novel Things Fall Apart gives us a vivid description of the transformation that a Nigerian society goes through. The first part of the novel covers the different aspects of the villagers and their culture. One of the examples is the description of the New Yam Festival. “It was an occasion for giving thanks to Ani, the earth goddess and the source of all fertility” (Achebe 36). “The New Yam Festival was an occasion for joy throughout Umuofia” (Achebe 37). This same society undergoes change with the arrival of the missionaries. “That was a source of great sorrow to the leaders of the clan” (Achebe 143). “The arrival of the missionaries had caused a considerable stir in the village of Mbanta” (Achebe 144). The title is an allusion to W.B. Yeats’ famous poem “The Second Coming”. In the third line of the first stanza, William Butler Yeats refers to a situation that will bring upon chaos. He mentions that ‘the centre cannot hold’ this change which in his poem alludes to the birth of a religion. There is a clear parallel to be made with the situation in the Igbo village.
From the point of view of Okonkwo, his society falls apart, as the Igbo society goes through changes which are more imposed than natural. The religious beliefs of the people in Umuofia and the surrounding villages were very strong before the colonists came. The villagers kept wooden figures of gods in their houses and only went to war if their gods allowed them to do so. These details are significant since they emphasize the existing beliefs before a new religion is brought into the region. As mentioned above, Achebe’s approach to the African novel gives a new dimension to the understanding of the meeting of identities. It is interesting to read about the dignity felt by the villagers as they indulged in their daily village life.

Furthermore, we can mention that Achebe brings the Nigerian culture to life by his use of language. The choice of using English as the main language of the novel is essential to promote an international understanding of the message of the novel. In addition, Achebe takes pain to portray the Igbo customs and culture. By using axioms, folktales and melodies borrowed from the Igbo dialect, he figured out how to capture the cultural richness and originality of the Igbo villagers: “here was a man whose Chi says nay despite his own affirmation” (Achebe 94). “Never kill a man who says nothing” (Achebe 140) is an example of the many proverbs that are used in Things Fall Apart. At the same time, there is a difference and a barrier which language causes. When the European missionaries seek to speak with the Igbo villagers, they brought an interpreter from another village: “Many people laughed at his dialect and the way he used words strangely. Instead of saying ‘myself’ he always said ‘my buttocks’” (Achebe 144). This illustrates the initial stage of ‘essentializing’ whereby two different cultures have a distinct identity in a pre-colonial period. This is the starting point for the study of hybrid cultural identity. Before hybridity takes place, there is a need to define the ‘ground’ culture: in this case the culture of the Ibo people, their beliefs and way of life. Additionally, it must be highlighted that the next step of cultural hybridization is
permeated by the shift in identities from the ‘positioning’ of identity to a process of oscillation and domination.

Colonialism: Alternating and Converting

This chapter starts by analyzing the concept of ‘alternating’ which is explained by Chan Kwok-bun as one group being “internalized” by the other “through socialization”. The socialization referred to is the encounter of one group with the other. Moreover, the term ‘converting’ “suggests a replacement (...) because of an alleged loss of negation of one culture by another, because the person is by now uprooted” (140).

The discussion now moves towards colonialism. It has been shown earlier that the two groups, colonizer and colonized have distinct identities in the novel. The villagers in the Igbo society come in contact with the British colonizer as the latter is on a mission of colonizing. One group will be “residing inside the mind” of the other, yet in a “compartmentalized” manner. There is a juggling of identity. “Identity is thus a manner of positioning” (Kwok-bun 140). Kwok-bun comments that there exists an engagement between two identities which are in continuous oscillation. The white man tries to quickly make his plans known without giving much time for reflection. “They asked for a plot of land to build their church” (Achebe 148). They “went into the village in the morning to preach the gospel” (Achebe 149).

This force of colonialism creates a platform of interaction. The villager has no choice but to listen and try to figure out what will happen. In the novel, there is more reaction than interaction. The colonizer keeps strongly to his will as he positions himself in a situation of power. According to McLeod, “Colonialism is perpetuated in part by justifying to those in the colonizing nation the idea that it is right to rule over other peoples, and by getting colonized people to accept their lower ranking in the
colonial order of things” (18). This is an important effect of colonialism which is at the heart of the concept of cultural hybridity. It is called ‘colonising the mind’ (18). The discourse of colonialism gives rise to a split identity within the colonized: “colonized subjects are split between contrary positions. They are domesticated, harmless, knowable; but also at the same time wild, harmful, mysterious” (53). There is a period where it is impossible to talk of a static position of the colonized who is in constant motion. This corresponds to the theory of Kwok-bun which is ‘alternating’. The people in the Igbo society are being pulled in opposite directions: traditions versus a new era.

As the story in Things Fall Apart unfolds, there is bewilderment and confusion. The appearance of the white man and the introduction of a new religion and new customs cause confusion and curiosity in the village. The white man comes into the picture when Okonkwo lives at his mother’s village Mbanta during his exile. They establish a church on a piece of land in the evil forest, where people with evil diseases are buried. The villagers are surprised that the white man builds a shrine in the evil forest. “The villagers were so certain about the doom that awaited these men” (Achebe 150). However, the stage of ‘alternating’ does not last long since colonialism is a driving force that strikes hard in the village. Most of the villagers do not dwell in a period of oscillation. The villagers had predicted that the missionaries would not survive since they would be doomed to death for having used the Evil Forest grounds. But this did not happen. “But they were still alive, building a new red-earth and thatch house for their teacher, Mr. Kiaga” (Achebe 151). This is a crucial turning point which will unconsciously lead to a change in beliefs since the white man thereby “won a handful of converts” (Achebe 151). This is a clear example of both ‘alternating’ and ‘converting’. Robert J.C. Young refers to ‘deculturation and acculturation’. Some use the word ‘fusion’ or ‘assimilation’. After establishing the fact that the colonized had a history, a past and an identity, it is necessary to show the process whereby this identity encounters
‘the space of the otherness’ as expressed by Homi Bhabha when he explains his concept of hybridity. When the missionaries “told them that they worshipped false Gods, gods of wood and stone” (Achebe 145), the villagers react by inquiring about the name of his God. The villagers who listened to the interpreter instantly lost respect for him because of his unfamiliar accent. Since the interpreter, through his use of language, revealed he was not one of them, he was not given the respect as any other man; the speaker of another culture was not listened to carefully. It is important to stress the relevance of language as a part towards cultural hybridization. As much as language shows the distinctness between the two cultures, it also settles down and finds its place in the lives of the villagers. Even though the villagers do not listen carefully, they interact by laughing. They recognize this ‘otherness’ and mock it. They comment: “Your buttocks understand our language” (Achebe 145).

To further illustrate the notion of ‘converting’ during the era of colonialism, Frantz Fanon writes the following in *The Postcolonial Studies Reader*: “By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people and distorts, disfigures and destroys it” (120). In his essay *On National Culture* in the same collection, he writes that colonialism and postcolonialism affect the National Culture of a country. In the same document, Fanon goes on to say that “Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native’s brain of all form and content” (120). The statement is powerful in showing how the colonized gives in and converts. This perspective belongs to the colonizer as he sets out to conquer. There is a tone of irony used by Achebe as this idea is exposed: “When they had all gathered, the white man began to speak to them…’We have been sent by this great God and turn to Him so that you may be saved when you die’(...)” (Achebe 145).

It is worth highlighting the fact that hybridity depends on this stage in the process: ‘converting’. Postcolonial theory focuses on the oppression of those who were
colonized. There are two parts in this infliction of values from the coloniser to the subaltern: the internalization and the resistance. When the subject internalizes the values, we see the process of ‘converting’. The term implies religious conversion in the following lines: “An abominable religion has settled among you. A man can now leave his father and (…) I fear for you; I fear for the clan” (Achebe 167). These words are spoken by one of the elders in the clan. The son of Okonkwo converts to Christianity. “But there was a young lad who had been captivated. His name was Nwoye, Okonkwo’s first son” (Achebe 147). When the white men come to the village of Okonkwo, they build a church and a courthouse. This causes the society to change and the values along with it: “But he says that our customs are bad; and our own brothers who have taken up his religion also say that our customs are bad” (Achebe 182). The quotation reflects the white man's thoughts about the violent ways of the Africans and how they manage to convince and convert many people from the village. Violence and strength are no longer valued but punished and a lot of the villagers change their way of thinking.

In his book The Colonizer and the Colonized, Albert Memmi contends that “The colonialist's existence is so closely aligned with that of the colonized (…) With all his power he must disown the colonized while their existence is indispensable to his own” (54). This statement not only reflects a postcolonial perspective, but it also points out to the bond that is prevalent between the oppressor and the oppressed. This is the base of hybridity, which at its core involves the merging of two entities. The dynamic nature of hybridity comes forth as colonialism enforces domination. As a postcolonial writer, Chinua Achebe describes the details associated with domination whereby change instills in the lives of those who are in subjugation and by doing so changes the whole essence of their existence. This is what ‘converting’ means in this analysis.
The colonial discourse has put forward the mission of the colonizer by emphasizing how civilized it was. In his writing on *Natural Culture*, Fanon writes that: “The total result looked for by colonial domination was to convince the natives that colonialism came to lighten their darkness. The effect consciously sought by colonialism was to drive into the native’s head the idea that if the settlers were to leave, they would at once fall back into barbarism, degradation and bestiality” (165). This way of thinking seeps through as the white man gains more and more power and *Things Fall Apart* depicts the reaction of the African to this tyrannical rule. There is internalization but also resistance. Okonkwo cannot accept the new society and instead of changing and starting to show emotion, he becomes even harder and more violent. His directly militant stance towards the missionaries originates not only in his hatred towards the system but also through his fear of alienation. “Where have you been? /.../ “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. Nwoye stood looking at him and did not say a word. The women were screaming outside, afraid to go in” (Achebe 151). These are his words to his son Nwoye who joins the ranks of the Christians, something which infuriates Okonkwo. There is a new cultural hybridity. Nwoye, Okonkwo’s son converts to Christianity whereas Okonkwo resists. They have contradicting values within the family.

Towards the end of the novel, those who did not convert to the ways of the colonizer gathered in the village and these words sum up the aftermath of the infiltration of the white man on the soil of Nigeria: “They have broken the clan and gone their several ways(…)If we fight the strangers we shall hit our brothers and perhaps shed the blood of a clansmen. But we must do it” (Achebe 203). These lines are significant because they reveal the determination of a clan which has been hit by the wave of
colonization. Some have resisted whereas others have followed this ‘stranger’. The society has changed form, hybridity has taken place.

Post-Colonialism and Hybridizing

The fourth stage towards cultural hybridization is labelled ‘hybridizing’ by Chan Kwok-bun and the definition is as follows: “the air-tight compartmentalization (...) is removed intentionally as well as unconsciously if the person can culturally ‘let go’ and not be so ‘uptight’ about one’s culture of origin and at the same time strive not to be overly critical of the place of ‘arrival’” (141). This section discusses the meaning and impact of colonialism after which there is a place of no return: post-colonialism. The study wishes to analyze the role of colonialism as a triggering factor towards the creation of this hybrid cultural identity.

On the one hand, Achebe sheds light upon the struggles of an idealistic man like Okonkwo as he slowly fades into obscurity which culminates in his tragic demise. Okonkwo’s conservative and idealistic character is the destruction of not only himself, but of all Igbo society. This tragedy illustrates the fact that the coming of the White Man was aggressive and created an enforced meeting with this traditional man. Intertwining into this story of cultural hybridity is the tragedy of a man. Okonkwo’s suicide became symbolic for the cultural and societal shift that occurred with the introduction of the missionaries. The change occurred when he was in exile. “Okonkwo was deeply grieved. And it was not just a personal grief. He mourned for the clan, which he saw breaking apart, and he mourned for the warlike men of Umuofia, who had so unaccountably become soft like women” (Achebe 183). In the case of Okonkwo, he is not the typical product of hybridization. He stands as an example of revolt. The novel ends and does not take the reader beyond a certain point. It leaves the reader with the
picture of Okonkwo in a vacuum. He never really gets close to hybridity because he portrays rejection and alienation of all that colonialism stands for.

On the other hand, there is a new cultural hybrid: “The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers, and our clans can no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart.” (Achebe 176). This quotation reveals the turning point in the novel and is one of the most significant quotes in postcolonial literature. It reveals the slimy nature of colonialism with ways of operating like a snake but also highlights the change in the nature of the hybrid. ‘Compartmentalization’ is no more: the clan has been broken. The African has ‘let go’ of his culture. He has adopted the religion of the white man as well as his language.

Post-colonialism exists after the end of the Empire: colonial rule leaves lingering effects. Because of the opportunities brought forth and removed by Christianity and the Europeans, the Igbes are often depicted caught in between embracing Christianity and fighting it. The traditions themselves can be interpreted as a cause for the breakdown of the Ibo village’s tribal ways and customs. At the same time, the white man and his intriguing ways of surviving the tribal offences draws more and more converts. Along with their powerful impacts and welcoming of anyone, the people of the Ibo village are slowly converting and leaving a fragmentary society where the tribal ways and customs are no longer obeyed. Okonkwo’s best friend, Obierika, expresses sorrow as he talks about it. “Our own men and our sons have joined the ranks of the stranger. They have joined his religion and they help to uphold his government” (Achebe 176). All the separate factors merge into one, and eventually make things fall apart. With the arrival of the missionaries, the Igbo people become divided, when the missionaries and the rest
of the society convert some of them to the Christian faith and the rest of the society continues to believe in their traditional religion and philosophy.

What is now left is a cultural hybrid, the process of hybridization is already settled in. There is a shared destiny between the colonizer and the colonized. “What he is actually renouncing is part of himself, and what he slowly becomes as soon as he accepts a life in a colony. He participates in and benefits from those privileges which he half-heartedly denounces. Does he receive less favorable treatment than his fellow citizens?” (Memmi, 20). Albert Memmi has asked himself some vital questions about the relationship between the two distinct groups of colonizers and the colonized. He further goes on to state the fact that “The colonialist does not plan his future in terms of the colony, for he is there only temporarily and invests only what will bear fruit in his time” (69). In the era of post-colonialism, the colonized finds himself in a situation where he is in a state of transition where he does not dwell on the past but moves on, reaping the benefits of a situation that is now a reality: a new era.

Conclusion

The three eras of pre-colonialism, colonialism and post-colonialism have been the framework for the analysis of cultural hybridization. We have drawn attention to concepts like essentialism, assimilation, conversion to illustrate this process of hybridization. Chinua Achebe’s Things Fall Apart has been examined using a postcolonial approach to support the different claims made in this essay. Achebe portrays how the influx of the white men in Nigeria caused great damage in terms of tribal ways and customs, and how things gradually fell apart. This can be concluded since the religion, the judicial system and the traditional culture of Umuofia were replaced as the missionaries slowly overpowered the Igbo, which forced many changes upon the villagers. By taking us to a genuine African village and thoroughly describing
the lives of the inhabitants and their complex way of life, Achebe provides his readers with an understanding of the destructive effects of the step by step colonization process like never before. At the same time, Achebe stays objective throughout the novel, and does not judge neither missionaries nor the Igbo in his writing, which is yet another reason why *Things Fall Apart* was so revolutionary at the time it was written. This is together with Achebe’s unique use of language certainly makes *Things Fall Apart*, one of the greatest and most remarkable African novels of all time.

“Cultures are made of continuities and changes and the identity of a society can survive through these changes. Societies without change aren’t authentic, they are just dead.” This is a quote from *Cosmopolitanism* by Kwayme Anthony Appiah. As a tribute to Chinua Achebe who passed away in 2013 at the age of 82, Appiah says that the work of Achebe “captures the sense of threat and loss that must have faced many Africans as empire invaded and disrupted their lives” (Appiah 2006). An analysis of *Things Fall Apart* in the light of hybrid cultural identity provides an enriching experience of understanding the mixed identity of the writer but most deeply of the merge of identities which result in binary opposition: the sad story of a place where things fall apart. The title of the novel reveals the fact that the identities of the colonized people have been stolen. This analysis shows it from a postcolonial perspective since postcolonial writers claimed that the colonizer almost erased the culture of the indigenous. This paper has provided a four-part progression of cultural hybridity based on Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*. It has been proved that the arrival of the British missionaries instigates a hybrid cultural identity. The reflection at the end of the last chapter of the novel has a message. “In the many years in which he had toiled to bring civilization to different parts of Africa he had learned a number of things” (Achebe 208). We are told that the Commissioner planned to write a book about it all. “Every day brought him some new
material” (Achebe 208). The novel leaves us, however, with a question: ‘Who is the Nigerian or the British after this experience?’
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