

An Epistemic Survey of African (Igbo) Notions of Knowledge in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*

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Abstract

This study undertakes an epistemic survey of the notions of knowledge among Igbos of Nigeria as couched in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. In this work, Achebe relives the vibrant world of Igbo people before the advent of colonialists in Nigeria. Therefore, the study unveils the roles and significance of knowledge among the Igbos, the beauty and depth of the people's values system as enshrined in their culture and traditions. It also exposes the place of elders and oral tradition as both purveyors and repository of knowledge hence, their relevance in Igbo knowledge acquisition process. The work showcases that life among the Igbos was chiefly communal. Knowledge in this society, was acquired through collective experience and wisdom by individual persons' participation in the community's rituals, myths and folklores. However, the researcher adopted the hermeneutical and textual analysis methods of inquiry, which enabled the researcher to interpret and analyse the Novel, *Things Fall Apart*. In line with our hermeneutical method, we clarified the meaning of *Omenani* (traditions) of the people and its' influence on the epistemology of the people. This study found that any strongly held beliefs or cultural values, which bring only crises when people of different cultures interact, necessitates the need for the cultivation of proper epistemological modesty instead of a tenacious attachment to customs and traditions. Lastly, our study recommends a relevant epistemic change as panacea to cultural and social rifts. This more balanced knowledge system being recommended has the capacity of engendering inter-cultural interactions and ensuring social harmony even in the face of the challenges of cultural globalisation. This novel problem-solving system is located in the idea of epistemic inter-culturalism.

Keywords: Change, Colonialism, Epistemic, Igbo, Indigenous and Inter-culturalism.

Introduction

The corpus of traditional thought, knowledge or Igbo philosophy is the *Omenani* or *Omenala* (which means that practice which happens on "*Anior Ala*" Earth or Land). *Ani or Ala* among the Igbos double as the overall principle of morality, which determines the good and the bad, the acceptable and the reprehensible. Knowledge here is in a deeper sense, the possession of good understanding and good sense of discernment, which involves in the main, a critical disposition that enables one to correctly judge and assess situations and people.

The Igbos of *Things Fall Apart* held tenaciously to their cultural worldviews and ideologies, which were extremely difficult for Westerners to understand. They considered the Westerners' churches, schools and courts as instruments of injustice, whose major pre-occupation was the spreading of ignorance rather than knowledge. On this basis, their advent into the Igbo soil was unwanted and considered as an uncomfortable encroachment and destabilisation of a peaceful and stable African – Igbo society. But as Bertrand Russel opines, “In daily life, we assume as certain many things which on closer scrutiny are found to be so full of apparent contradictions that only a great amount of thought enables us to know what it is that we may believe” (Russel, 1974, p1).

Now for the Igbos, this collective wisdom (Omenani) represents a consensus truth established by the living and the dead, if any deviation from or violation of which demands resilience. Okonkwo in this novel represents this resilience to change. Yet, it was these same customs that sanctioned wicked burial rites and widowhood practices, female circumcision and infanticide which manifested in the killing of twins. Now the question arises: Is such *Omenani* or *Omenala* worth dying for? Given that every society has its culture and stock of philosophy or ideology, how philosophically justifiable is it for any particular society to discover in its customs (Omenani), such body of knowledge that is all sufficing, with absolute certainty? Will such attitude not amount to philosophical monism or astigmatism? How can this cultural aloofness with its bogus claims of authentic certainty and reliability, which is assumed to be without any foreign accretions, be epistemologically tolerated? Though Achebe did not expressly raise these issues about *Omenani* but Okonkwo's attitude seems to suggest the foregoing hence he even died for this cause. Okonkwo's attitude of resisting change smacks of intolerable epistemic naivety. This is because if a particular society's custom becomes a yardstick for adjudging truth and knowledge, then research will certainly be stalled and interactions among nations will cease. In the same way, even forced acculturation from the West is also condemnable. If Africans jettison all their customs and culture in favour of western worldviews, what would be left of their unique identity? This study holds that constructive change must consist in a synthesis and synergy of the positive characteristics of many cultural ideologies in to strike an epistemic balance in the philosophical search for pertinent, relevant and indubitable knowledge.

It is consequent upon the foregoing, that this article aims at an epistemic survey of Igbo notions of knowledge as found in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. The researcher exposes these notions and suggests *epistemic-interculturalism* as a safe path to harmonious international interactions and relations.

The Subject of *Things Fall Apart*: A Synopsis

Things Fall Apart is Achebe's first novel published by Heinemann Educational Books in the year 1958. It takes its title and theme from a poem entitled *The Second Coming* written by an Irish poet, W. B. Yeats. The lines couching the title read thus:

Turning and turning in the widening of gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things Fall Apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world
The blood – demand tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocent is drowned (Achebe, 1958, p5).

This awareness of things falling apart was consequent upon the incident of sudden change in the Igbo natives' worldview and perception of the world occasioned by the advent of the Whiteman. The Europeans had encroached into the Igbo world with their metaphysical religion called Christianity and an entirely new body of knowledge as reflected in their educational curriculum and general worldview. All these were alien and foreign to the Igbo natives, who were most unprepared for this intrusion. It is not surprising that Obierika in his accusation of the Whiteman complains thus: "Now he has won our brothers and our clan can no longer act like one. He has put knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart" (Achebe, 1958, p5). Therefore, the book is all about a clan which once thought like one, spoke like one, shared a common awareness and acted like one. The Whiteman came and his coming broke this unity. In the process, many lost their lives new words, new usages, and new applications gained entrance into men's heads and hearts and the old society gradually faded away.

The book opened with the main character namely Okonkwo seen at the height of his power, fame and personal achievements. Regrettably, it ended with Okonkwo becoming a tragic hero, who took his own life as a result of his adamant resistance brought about by the conflict of western versus the indigenous Igbos. It is also pertinent to note that culture is understood here in the sense of its reference to what Hedding and Gluck in their *Introduction to Sociology* (1992) see as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, law, customs and other capabilities and habits acquired by man, as a member of a particular society" (Hedding & Gluck, 1992, p39).

Findings

The interest in this study is to extract African (Igbo) notions of knowledge from Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and as C. S. Nwodo in his *Philosophical Perspectives On Chinua Achebe* (2004) rightly observes: "Achebe gives a broad understanding to include both the advantages of the acquisition of relevant knowledge and the consequences, often disastrous, of ignorance, misunderstanding as well as failure to avail oneself of relevant knowledge (Nwodo, 2004, p3).

Achebe, in *Things Fall Apart*, underscores the fact that the momentous clash between traditional Igbo and the technologically advanced European cultures could result in a miscarriage or better put, loss of identity, a loss capable of emasculating the senses of worth and self-confidence of the indigenous tribe. With the virtual destruction of the traditional African system, the African was left with no cohesive value to anchor his belief hence he needed the relevant knowledge that would

enable him to adapt to the new situation. As Achebe emphasised in 1964: “The worst thing that can happen to any people is the loss of their dignity and self-respect...” (Ezuma, 1989, p13).

Besides, Achebe balances his views on this relevant knowledge by creating the need for a revision and/or critical re-assessment of certain nefarious indigenous customs and practices. Hence, Ogbuefi Ezeudu is seen condemning the custom in Obodoani, which regards one who dies during the Week of Peace as an abomination and should not be buried but cast into the Evil Forest. “It is bad custom which these people observe because they lack understanding” (Achebe, 1958, p23). Achebe hereby points out that even the indigenous customs failed to suffice as a wholesome conception of the good. Knowledge here was not altogether pertinent and comprehensive.

Again, part of the reasons things fell apart as Wren Robert argues in his *Achebe's World: The Historical and Cultural Context of the Novels of Achebe* included, lack of understanding on either side:

On the side of the British, there was a tendency to see in Igbo only negations of “civilization and administrative problems”. They saw only that the people were maddeningly difficult to deal with, proud, confident, self-satisfied, disinclined to proper humility, disdainful of any authority save their own, apparently indifferent even to their own leaders. The Igbo on their own part failed to understand the British initially, a failure that was later compounded by confusion and self-doubt (Wren, 1981, p18-19).

However, *Things Fall Apart* has different levels of knowledge as well as growth in knowledge. Nwodo (2004, p4) opines thus: “Growth in knowledge or the acquisition of technique constitutes a form of change in its own right whereas the application of such knowledge introduces yet another form of change but at the lowest level [of this knowledge] is man’s exposure to natural phenomena such as the extremities of weather”.

The survival of the people in this novel depended on the quality of their existence, which in turn depended also on their ability to understand correctly and manipulate natural forces. Hence, the Igbos of *Things Fall Apart* could be rightly said to have the notions of knowledge subsequently discussed.

African (Igbo) Notions of Knowledge in *Things Fall Apart*:

The notion here is to be understood as a mere belief about or conception of something, it could also mean an idea or impression. Therefore, our discussion in this sub-section centers on African (Igbos) conceptions of knowledge. We will briefly discuss these conceptions as found in *Things Fall Apart*.

The Notion of Knowledge as Mastery of Forces of Nature

Borne out of their major occupation of their subsistence farming, their lives were in the main, agrarian. To survive in this environment, the Igbo man needed to be capable of manipulating natural forces. Professor Killam in his *The Writings of*

Chinua Achebe has this to say about the forces of nature in the novel: "...and we appreciate their elemental quality because the life of the people in all its variety is governed by seasons" (Killam, 1977, p13). Supporting Killam, Wren posits that "Achebe portrays a civil society... It is an agricultural community, subject to the order and vagaries of season and weather" (Wren, 1978, p10). Given their rural setting, to be knowledgeable in this context entailed expertise in manipulating and understanding the extremities of weather (The News Websters, 2004, p1287).

Knowledge as "Techne"

By definition, the Greek word "techne" refers to skill or arts. By this, the Igbos in this novel conceive knowledge in the sense of the acquisition of some skill or technique, the possession of which makes a difference. In one of his early essays "The Novelist as Teacher" (1965), cited in Miller, Achebe admits his preference for applied art and confesses that perhaps what he wrote was applied art as distinct from pure art.

Nwoye, Okonkwo's first son, needed to acquire the art of growing yams early enough. That is the reason Okonkwo admonishes them: "Yam stood for manliness, and he who could feed his family on yams from one harvest to another was a very great man indeed" (Achebe, 1958, p23). In this Igbo setting, the ability to acquire this skill of seed yam preparation and growing makes one great. From here, one infers that mere strength was not just enough. This means that apart from being a hard worker, an Igbo boy needed intelligence to know in Nwodo's words –What to do, how to do it and when to do it. In any case, "the benefits of being very successful farmer are many, one of which is social recognition" (Nwodo, 2004, p5), which means that among other advantages, knowledge bestows honour and recognition. Another instance of the notion of knowledge as technique is seen in the person of Okagbue Uyanwa, whom Achebe saw as an expert in his field. Hence, he demonstrated all the attributes of a professional, a seasoned craftsman in dealing with Ogbanje children: "He knew how to be patient, repeat his questions if need be, and wait for an answer. The one thing he did not need was Okonkwo's frequent interferences. I have told you to let her alone. I know how to deal with it" (Achebe, 1958, p58).

Knowledge here is converted to solutions in a pragmatic style before recognition is being relevant. Achebe's main point here is that growth in knowledge and understanding invariably brings with it social advantages and positive changes in the form of improvement either in case of the individual or in the community. However, this knowledge could be acquired either early or late in life. Hence, age is no barrier to learning. While age is no barrier, it is important to note that in Igbo society gender and gender roles were very important. The place of males was higher than that of females, and males were more associated with depth of knowledge and wisdom than females (Chilala 2003; 2018).

The Notion of Oral Tradition as Repository of Knowledge

In *Things Fall Apart* oral tradition is heavily relied upon as the central vehicle for the preservation and transmission of knowledge among the Igbos. Younger generations were enlightened about the cultural values and traditions of their people by the retelling of Igbo myths, folk tales, rituals and oral histories of the people. Through this epistemic route, the moral values, practical insights for navigating life's challenges were conveyed to the youths. Moonlight stories were almost a daily ritual, hence we gain deeper insight into the Igbo worldview by understanding the Igbo oral traditions. In so many cases, the justice system employed oral traditions to settle land disputes. Such was the authoritative role of oral tradition among the Igbos.

Knowledge as Being Sensible

Being sensible is reduced to its Igbo rendition as *Inwe Uche*. This entails having a good understanding of things, passing pertinent judgment on things. Knowing the right thing to do and doing it at the right time. (Discernment and proactive action) Obiageli, the younger half sister of Ezinma, when Ezinma foolishly engages her father in a conversation at meal time asserts that people should not talk when eating or pepper may go the wrong way. Okonkwo agrees with her, adding: "Do you hear that, Ezinma? You are older than Obiageli but she has more sense" (Achebe, 1958, p32). Having "more sense" entails a good knowledge of etiquette and also knowing the meaning and value of things not just head knowledge. Here, a big case is made for the place of morality, right actions and acceptable ways to behave in a human society.

The latest notion of knowledge shows that though the Igbos greatly attribute knowledgeability to age there are exceptions. An aged person could as well be epistemically vacuous and not qualify for the status of respectability accorded to his or her mates. Not surprisingly, Okonkwo in chapter fourteen of *Things Fall Apart* exhibits cheerful readiness to learn from his maternal uncle – Uchendu. Not every grey hair is counted knowledgeable unless those that have pragmatically and successfully employed their know-how to solve societal problems. Similarly, being sufficiently acquainted with etiquettes as seen above also constitutes a part of knowledgeability or being sensible among the Igbos as could be seen in *Things Fall Apart*. Part of the reason things fell apart is that Igbos felt the Whiteman's way of life, namely western education and the Christian religion preached by the missionaries, did not appeal to the indigenous Igbo people's values and culture.

Receptivity to Change as a Notion of Knowledge

Okonkwo was sandwiched between two knowledge systems. The advent of colonialism and Christianity occasioned a clash with the indigenous knowledge system that the Okonkwo and his people were used to. *Things Fall Apart* portrays the Igbo system and values which includes proverbs, oral tradition, wise sayings

and communal knowledge. The imposition of foreign knowledge and values made the Igbo maintain their tribal identity. Okonkwo resisted the new knowledge and this contributed to his downfall.

Things Fall Apart demonstrates the dangers of a skewed understanding of foreign world views. Okonkwo's failure to comprehend the implications of the foreign knowledge and his tenacious hold on traditional values blinded him to alternative ways to responding to the crisis caused by the impact of western knowledge and values on him and the Igbo nation. It would have been possible for Okonkwo to be more receptive and flexible in his response to the descent of western ideas.

Knowledge as Consensus Opinion and Wise Counsel

In *Things Fall Apart*, oratory though a splendid gift was not so highly esteemed, quite unlike what the Whiteman does. Rather, wise counsel is more esteemed among Igbos. We saw how Ogbuefi Ezeugo stood up in the midst of the assembly and bellowed four times, "Umuofia kwenu" (Achebe 1958, p8) and on each occasion faced a different direction. However, it was not simply because he could speak very well that Ogbuefi Ezeugo was always chosen to speak. Inspiring as his speech may have been, many still spoke, and at the end, it was decided that they follow the normal course of action. The normal course of action is that everyone both the wise and the foolish, young and old are allowed to contribute to the decision taken in Igbo society in the spirit of complementarity. Tradition will always demand maintenance of the "*status quo ante*" hence, the need for a change as emphasised by Achebe. The change of our reference can only be a product of relevant knowledge.

Iweh (1991, p145) in his *Socio-Ethical Issues in Nigeria* submits that: "The Igbo sense of democracy is a belief, custom and practice that in what concerns all, all should be duly consulted and participate. This traditional value affords every Igbo man in the traditional society an intrinsic worth, which should not be taken for granted. According to this value system, nothing is imposed on any individual arbitrarily".

It may be seen here how original the the concept of democracy is in Igbo land. Ifemesia reports: "The general view of Igbo life is that it is highly egalitarian, relatively classless, democratic and based on decision taking through the openly arrived at consensus of group of persons" (Chieka, 2002, p55). Hence, in Umuofia, wise counsel will always prevail because Umuofia will "never fight what the Igbo called a fight of blame" (Achebe, 1958, p9). The only instrument that saves from such "fight of blame" is a reasoned out action, which is not a product of oratory. Nwodo agrees with the foregoing view but adds that this attitude among the Igbos is chiefly meant to serve a complementary purpose. Therefore, he avers thus: "The community and the individual complement each other in a harmonious balance that allows the wise and the not so wise, the warrior and the coward to make their contributions freely in the assembly of the people, where discussions are taken at the end after everybody has spoken" (Nwodo, 2004, p15).

Children needed to gain their experiences and be allowed to air some to enable them have their own say and contribute to the development of their society. Every “Efulufu” (the village idiot, ignorant and foolish) was considered a social misfit. In the eyes of these indigenous Igbo people, the Whitemen were just “Efulufus”, the reason being their lack of understanding of Igbo worldview.

In the latter discussion on the epistemic place of the elders in Igbo land, it will be discovered that, there seems to be contradiction somewhere. If the wise and aged are the sole preservers and interpreters of the people’s customs and tradition (Omenala), how true is it then that this community allows the young to contribute their ideas to the growth of their societies? However, this constitutes a shortcoming and a point for criticising some of the Igbo society’s notions of knowledge as couched in Omenala (customs and traditions).

Igbo Notion of Knowledge as Constituted in Omenala

Omenala (literally means that which happens in the land, referring to the traditions, customs, laws and philosophy of the people) plays a dual role in *Things Fall Apart*. It makes or mars depending on how one applies and adapts it. The Igbo *Ako na Uche* (insight and thoughtful understanding) separates the desirable and the useful from the not-so-helpful in Omenala. It is Achebe’s intention to sieve away some bad traditions of that society and to maintain the good ones.

Becoming knowledgeable the Igbo way means becoming sufficiently indoctrinated into the forms of Igbo knowledge as encapsulated in Omenala. Nwala (1985, p27) explains that,

Omenala refers to the actual practice of the customs as they apply to any aspect of social and ritual life of the various communities in Igbo... Indeed, Omenala is also the realization of the culture and civilisation of the Igbo. If you fail to do anything in the way it is supposed to be done under the custom of the people, they say “Omeghe Omenala or Omeghiyadi Omenala” – it was not done according to custom, Omenala includes major beliefs, about the origins of the universe and its nature, the place of spirits, deities, man and other beings in the universe, the nature or character of taboos (Aru) regulations, prescriptions and prohibitions as to what is proper in such a universe rules of marriage, sexual intercourse, attitudes to strangers, ... forms of social relationship, as well as the realm of simple decency and etiquette. Indeed, Omenala is a body of law and morals along with metaphysical foundation.

Obierika’s erudition in Omenala enabled him to understand the enormity of the people’s ontology which places the interest of the community first before those of the individuals (a factor Okonkwo failed to grasp, to his chagrin). It was this same factor that brought about the conviction that in Umuofia, only wise counsel prevails in the end because the Igbo assembly will always be guided to a wise decision. The words of men of substance like Ogbuefi Ezeugo and Obierika carried much weight. The connection between wealth and wisdom among Igbo is glaringly clear

in *Things Fall Apart*. The Igbos firmly believe that one's wisdom is a foundation for becoming wealthy. Here again, is faulted this conception nowadays because some "Efulufus" also make quick wealth. However, Nwodo (1985, p11) comments that: "The Igbo knows that hardwork is important if one would succeed in life, but even more important is resourcefulness, the power of discernment, shrewdness in judgment... the wise and the wealthy were the people, whose word carried a lot of weight in the assembly of the people. The respected wealthy were those who earned their wealth in honest ways through hard work."

Now, we can attain a better understanding of the reason behind Igbo industrious spirit. Yet not all wealth is honoured since ill-gotten wealth is despised. Even those who have erroneously been given chieftaincy titles due to their riches receive enough derision by those who know the source of their wealth as unclean and ill gotten.

All these were embodied in the people's custom and traditions and were results of a long history of wise leadership. Some people in Umuofia had been wealthy and wise and so they knew what proper actions to take for the good and honour of Umuofia at each stage of its historical process as ably guided by Omenala.

Okonkwo was wealthy but certainly not the philosopher of *Things Fall Apart*. He was rich but not wise, at least not at the level of wisdom that was necessary to admit him among the lords of the land, hence he was not even consulted when the decision was taken regarding Ikemefuna, who had been under his guardianship for three years. The decision to have the boy killed surprised Okonkwo. Thus the text says: "Okonkwo was not a man of thought but of action" (Achebe, 1958, p48). Okonkwo's lack of wisdom was responsible for his failure to satisfy all the requirements of success among the Igbo people of Umuofia.

The lesson here is that whereas customs must be preserved to maintain tribal identities, in Igbo land, right understanding and sensitive awareness of the basic ontological principles guiding the Igbo society are held paramount in the interpretation and observances of these customs. Okonkwo, though a strong advocate of "Omenala" fell victim to what he sought very much to protect even with his military prowess. He lacked "Ako na Uche" (insight and thoughtful understanding) that is relevant for survival in his time. Hence, he became a victim of the same customs. Lack of Amamihe (Wisdom) will always subject one to the dangers of ignorance. It will be recalled that this fate, namely lack of understanding of the new customs of Igbos and the worldviews of the encroaching colonising missionaries, cost Okonkwo his life and brought disdain to Rev. James Smith. Hence, Ajuofia would laugh at Rev. James Smith with scorn: "They are strangers, and are ignorant" (Achebe, 1958, p130). Smith's philosophy contrasted with that of the indigenes so he danced a furious step and the drums went mad" (Achebe, 1958, p131).

Besides, among the Igbos, elders are considered caregivers, guardians, teachers, directors of the young. Their grey hair earned them the right to courtesy, humility and politeness thus it tells of their experience. Consequently, they are considered as repositories of communal and folk wisdom and are therefore conceded leadership

roles in the affairs of the people. According to Onwubiko (1988, p39): “He who listens to an elder is like one who consults an oracle. The oracles are believed to give infallible truth. Thus the elders are also believed to give the truth and their word instructions are heeded for the promotion of good behaviour among the young.”

However, the respect given to the elders is borne out of their perceived closeness to the ancestors, who are venerated among the people. In fact, decisions in Igbo communities sometimes entail consulting the ancestors, who through oracles contribute to the well-being of their land. Therefore, they are guardians of the Igbo nation. This type of traditional thought is described by Wiredu (1980, p39) as “pre-scientific thought of the type that tends to construct explanations of natural phenomena in terms of activities of gods and spirits...”

Again, the respect given to elders in Igbo land due to their longevity and time-honoured spirit of discernment or right judgment has its practical effects in the maintenance of custom and tradition. The authority of elders regarding custom and tradition (*Omenala*) is overwhelming in issues of social control, among others. etcetera. Defiance of an elder’s authority or the stipulations of customs attract commensurate punishment. It is for these reasons that Ojike (1955, p50) describes Igbo traditional cosmology as *Omenalism* and regards it as an attempt to attain balance of cosmic forces.

Characteristically, *Omenala* does not yield to revisions, it is rather authoritarian and must be enforced to the letter. Any epistemic innovation which constitutes a paradigm shift from the stipulations of *Omenala* becomes *Aru* (an abomination). *Omenala* therefore smacks of dogmatism and epistemic naivety. This constitutes another ground for criticising this indigenous notion of knowledge.

The Notion of Justice as Knowledge

The ignorance of the customs of the indigenous Igbo society on the part of the missionaries and the colonisers had severe consequences (Ezuma, 1989, p14). As L. O. Ezuma observes that Achebe:

does not intend to liberate his people by “sloganeering or idealization of their history, but by leading them through the positive, if not painful, process of self-evaluation and criticism” Achebe nonetheless notes that apart from the church, the Whiteman had also brought a government. They had built a Court where the District Commissioner judged cases in ignorance “... the court messengers were foreigners and also arrogant and high handed (Achebe, 1980, p14).

The Whiteman and his court messengers were ignorant (referring to lack of understanding of the people’s custom). An instance, that evidences the foregoing idea being the experience of the people standing by and watching as the Whiteman’s court (through ignorance and corruption) awarded a person’s land to a wrong man. This miscarriage of justice was one of the aspects of the Whiteman’s coming that

angered the Igbo and created doubts in his mind about the Whiteman's sense of justice. Therefore, Igbos consider a sense of fair play and justice as part of knowledge and anybody that lacks the disposition to be fair and just is simply stupid and ignorant.

The Notion of Morality as Definitive of Knowledge

In *Things Fall Apart*, the case of morality being used to judge or critique certain religious practices is considered. It was obvious to Obierika and Nwoye that some of their people's religious practices and the commands of their gods were not morally justifiable. They were puzzled at how innocent twins could be thrown away and Nwoye was maddened by the fact that these same customs approved Ikemefuna's death. They wondered how their own gods could command things that were morally wrong. This was simply a case of the difference between religion and morality within the traditional context. The Christians preached against the killing of twins hence some among the people got impressed by the Christians' concern for the unfortunate weak and the innocent. These discovered elements of logic and truth in some Christian beliefs. As a consequence, Christian beliefs (despite containing many crazy ideas like the doctrine of the Trinity, which was unintelligible to the people), also appealed to some members of the indigenous Igbo society.

It is against this backdrop that this researcher disagrees with Oladele Taiwo in her *Culture and the Nigerian Novel* in her accusations of "inflexibility and inability of the Igbo to make necessary adjustment and the Igbo society's capacity for change" (Taiwo, 1976, p113). Taiwo (1976, p113) opines thus: "Although we find that the society has a concreteness of its own, it is not designed for dynamic growth." However, the researcher agree with his subsequent statement that "a society which barricades itself against new ideas and forms of actions is likely to experience a moral decline, not to mention an economic one" (Taiwo, 1976, p113). Yet his earlier argument seems to be false because the Igbo society by our foregoing discussion is dynamic.

According to Nwodo (2004, p22) Achebe says that "there were many men and women who did not feel like Okonkwo about the new dispensation... the Whiteman had indeed brought a lunatic religion.. And even in the matter of religion, there was a growing feeling that there might be something in it after all..." We strongly maintain that among the African/Igbo society of *Things Fall Apart* and besides the issue of morality as constituting knowledge, there was also room in the social organisation of the people for change and growth, which must be healthy and rational leading to a morally enriching change. Our evidence is that the Igbo society never stood with Okonkwo when he acted out of pride and epistemic loneliness, hence it is still a society that is both presently and potentially receptive to new ideas once they "make sense".

Conclusion

This study has attempted an epistemic examination of the notions of knowledge among the Igbos as couched in the novel: *Things Fall Apart*. The researcher's finding is that in as much as the pre-colonial Igbo culture held the people together in

a peaceful and secure environment, it initially resisted change and it was this element that turned its cultural clash with Western ideologies violent, costing Okonkwo his life. The West in this novel are also found to be ignorant of the indigenous African customs. These two cultures are found wanting on many epistemic fronts, hence the need for a synergy of their cultural epistemologies as found in epistemic inter-culturalism approach. Ajuofia in *Things Fall Apart* enthuses: “We can’t leave the matter in his hand because he does not understand our custom, just as we do not understand his. We say he is foolish because he does not know our ways, and perhaps, he says we are foolish because we do now know his, let him go” (Achebe, 1958, p184).

However, this study argues that the positive epistemic elements of Western culture should not have been discarded by the Igbo but exploited to compliment what is lacking in Igbo indigenous worldviews. Omoregbe (1994, p96) was therefore right when he asserted that: “Proper epistemological modesty comes from our realisation of the fact that our strongest held beliefs may turn out to be false or even deficient... this facilitates interaction and prevents dogmatism and will inturn make way for a variety of instrumentalist reasons that are not based on individual self-fulfillment and happiness.”

Udoidem in his *Engineering Culture for Peaceful Co-existence and Sustainable Development in Nigeria* buttresses Omoregbe’s views by suggesting what he calls, cultural debriefing. By this he meant, “a process by which one is trained out of his negative attribute by being made to realise that his cherished values are not really valuable...” (Udoidem, 2014, p8). The casting of this custom and culture cysts is the first step to the realisation of the idea of interculturalism as suggested in this study.

Therefore, this study is of the view that for nations and communities which culturally differ to harmoniously interact even internationally, there is need for crossbreeding of ideas as these different cultures may play complementary roles for the inadequacies of one another. It is based on this conviction about the merits of this ideological and cultural marriage, that this article suggests the idea of epistemic interculturalism, which allows for mutual reflection and understanding of different cultures but with the aim of creating an epistemic balance. This balance will engender a greater understanding and a harmonisation of cultural differences in international interactions and inter-communal relations.

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