

# The Vanished Hero: An Analysis of the Social Problems of African Tribes Through the Discussion of Okonkwo Characterization

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**Abstract:** In *Things Fall Apart*, we are introduced to the story of a majestic male hero who eventually comes to the end of his rope. The protagonist Okonkwo's life changes dramatically after he accidentally kills his adopted son Ikemefuna. Even though the whole incident can be described as a so-called accidental killing oops, we as readers and outsiders to Okonkwo's story still can't help but wonder: was it really a coincidental event? Would everything have been different had it not been for the mistake at Ezeudu's funeral?

This article analyzes the social factors and the mentality of the novel's protagonist, exploring the heroic image in Okonkwo's mind and in the minds of people in general in that era, as well as the disappearance of this kind of Anglo-Chineseism.

**Keywords:** Hero; Male power; Death; Race

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## 1. A specific heroic image in the context of the times

In fact, *Things Fall Apart* not only recreates the contradictions and conflicts between African indigenous people and Western colonizers from a macro perspective, but also focuses on the contradictory evolution within traditional African societies, portrays the interpretation of human nature during social transformation, and explores the empathy crisis that accompanies social fractures. According to British psychologist Simon Baron-Cohen, "empathy is the ability to understand what others are thinking or feeling and to respond to those thoughts and feelings with appropriate emotions. Empathy differs from sympathy in that the former emphasizes the ability to perceive human emotions and to share them with others, including but not limited to compassion, while the latter refers to feeling compassion for those who have suffered disasters and misfortunes. Empathy has a broader outreach, and it is difficult for people who have lost the power of empathy to feel compassion. In a society that lacks the importance and cultivation of empathy, the evil of human nature often grows unchecked, the lives and dignity of the disadvantaged are trampled and destroyed, and a rift in civilization arises. Through the novel "*Things Fall Apart*", the author focuses on the loss of human empathy and the resulting human evil and cultural collapse under the influence of internal and external forces. Therefore, this paper will explore the intrinsic correlation between empathy crisis and social crisis from the perspective of empathy inhibition in Igbo tribal culture, empathy deprivation in hostile imagination and empathy corrosion under situational forces, and reveal the social ethics and value orientation of Igbo people in the collision of old and new cultures.

The story takes place in an era when people were still in a more primitive period, mainly hunting. In the context of such times, there could not be a complete ruling securities formation, and war could break out at any time among the turbulent tribes. Every tribe needs a hero to come forward and give guidance to the people, both spiritually and in war and other survival activities. The existence of people like Okonkwo can be said to be an inevitable product of that era.

The situation at that time was such that a person was needed for both the development of society and various activities among people. In addition to making decisions - many of which were not artificially chosen under the economic model of the time but were necessarily shaped by the development of human society - it was more of a placebo-like spiritual encouragement for people. The African tribes at that time did not have any substantial religion and beliefs, and what could form a cohesive force in people's minds

was the image of a strong and heroic fighter. A strong appearance meant more resources for survival in hunting and other activities, which was the first priority for the people in that era. Valor meant that they could better protect their own people in activities such as wrestling or warfare that created conflicts with other tribes. As long as these two points are identified, one can survive and reproduce well in the situation at that time. So Okonkwo was the one who was necessary in the context of that particular era.

## **2. The Formation of Early Patriarchal Ideology on the African Continent**

We have already mentioned the survival mode of the people in the primitive tribe above, then we are going to explore more carefully the members of the tribe into two different genders.

Anyone who knows history knows that a long time ago, human beings experienced a matriarchal society, and the reason for the shift from matriarchal to patriarchal society is that in the further development of agriculture and handicrafts, the status and role of men in production became higher and higher, even more than women, so the center of society began to shift to patriarchal society.

It is important to know that during the primitive society, the productivity was low and the task of the society was to survive and reproduce, while women took the burden of reproduction and men mostly played the role of protection, which made women occupy the main position.

Men go out hunting, hunting a wild boar or a cow, a person will be able to eat for months, but these things and how easy it is to get? In the survival conditions of primitive society, if only rely on a single male individual or women to get food, is certainly not enough, so the need to form a tribe, together hunting, picking fruit, and then share the excess food to others.

The question arises, why should we share the food with others? Can't I just keep the food for myself and watch it rot? Of course you can, except that people and tribes with this idea, the basic trust between the entire tribe is gone, when all are unwilling to share food, the end is that everyone is starved to death, so these tribes disappeared.

There is only one condition in which human beings are willing to trust others unconditionally and share food with others even when they are dying of hunger, and this condition is "blood". In the original native society, human beings did not have a sense of "chastity" and could not confirm who their father was, but they could definitely know who their mother was, and their mother knew who her children were, and she was willing to share her food with them, and these children were willing to share food with their mother and siblings when they grew up. The trust brought by this blood relationship is extremely stable and is an institutional guarantee for the fair distribution of food. Thus, the most primitive tribes were surrounded by their mothers in the form of a "matrilineal bloodline" and followed her instructions.

This is why all civilizations have the concept of "Mother Earth", and many civilizations continue this to this day, such as the classic wartime slogan "Fight for Mother Earth". Because this is the most primitive, unreasonable, and can unite a group of people before the creation of words, culture, and beliefs.

What about the later shift to a patriarchal society? There are two reasons for this. The first is that humans have entered the era of farming, no longer need to go hunting inside nature every day, dismantle the blind box, as long as the down-to-earth, diligent farming, the same can not be starved to death. And more importantly, farming allows humans to have a surplus of production. These surplus production wealth, and hunting, fruit picking compared to simply not an order of magnitude, for many people may not be able to enjoy the whole life. At a time when farming was the main source of food for society, women, because they were not as strong as men, could not compete with men in farming and animal husbandry to create production surpluses, so they exchanged their reproductive capacity for men's productivity, choosing to fix with the man with the best productivity surplus value and ensuring that they had children of men's blood, so that the wealth created by men throughout their lives could be made available to children of their own. The man's lifetime wealth can be inherited by the child who has his own "blood".

In addition, compared to matrilineal society, patrilineal society has a stronger ceiling and expansion, because the number of children a woman can have in her life is limited, a mother is unlikely to have 20 children, but a father can do with 100 children, the primitive stage, the size of various clans are below 50 people, matrilineal clans are not weaker than patrilineal or even stronger, but with the emergence of language and writing, humans can. With the emergence of language and writing, mankind can use this way to spread information and knowledge, to put it bluntly is to brainwash others, so that others believe in themselves, so that the power of the new "faith".

Okonkwo killed Ikemefuna out of fear of loss of power and exodus in the patriarchal society. As the chief of the tribe, he did not trust Ikemefuna and was not willing to put everything he had worked so hard for into the hands of his unrelated adopted son - in other words, the status of adopted son in a patriarchal clan with blood ties as. In other words, the status of adopted son in a patrilineal clan, where blood is the bond, is against the benchmark of inheritance. The patriarchal clan's male power is reflected

in many of the descriptions in the book, such as Okonkwo's ability to have three wives; Okonkwo's verbal and physical violence against his wife, which is mentioned several times; and the fact that he was exiled to the place where his mother lived even though he killed a man in time.

The exile of Okonkwo in the book is the product of another male gaze, namely, that it is honorable to live with the father's clan and shameful to live with the mother's clan as a punishment.

### **3. Reverence for Human Life**

Okonkwo's killing of Ikemefuna, Okonkwo's suicide, and the tribal people's fear of death in the face of white settlers' aggression all point to a common theme, namely the fear of life. It seems absurd to talk about reverence for life in a novel that is all about death and violence and aggression - how can we say that someone who kills and commits suicide has a reverence for life? But it is not. First of all, we have to understand that Okonkwo's murder is a difficult thing for him to accept. He did kill his adopted son by mistake, but it was a necessary reaction to defend his own interests and those of his community under social conditions. As the leader of the community, the people he led and protected turned against him due to the mind control and fear of advanced warfare, causing his last beliefs to collapse. He cannot accept the present state of the land and people he loves and protects, so he has to end his own life, otherwise he will live his whole life in this kind of pain far beyond his ability to bear.

In the end, "Things Fall Apart" is about invasion and suffering, especially the invaded black people, Okonkwo is also considered one of the victims in the end, his murder and suicide fighters have reasons and some inevitability, the real disregard for life is to expand the territory of the white invaders who want to kill. The author has said that what he wants to do is not only to force Europeans to question their imagination of a so-called "barbaric" Africa, but also to make Africans who have accepted the European model retain more faith in the traditional culture of their people. Every one of the primitive tribes has a reverence for life, as can be seen from their worship of "Mother Earth", both for man and nature. The novel not only criticizes the thought control of the black people for several years, but also exposes the true indifference and disregard for life of the moral white preachers. Those white men who claim that God loves people do not love and accept equally the heathen of other colors who do not submit to their rule. The love and righteousness that was preached was only a magnificent shell for their dirty ambitions. What died along with Okonkwo was the civilization and free will that people could have formed naturally.

### **4. Ideology, Religion, Race and Invasion**

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, European states gradually expanded their colonial control over Africa, eventually colonizing many regions of the continent, and this colonial control was driven in large part by the economic and political and cultural motivations of European states. At this time, European countries began to use technological and force advantages to conquer and control African regions in order to gain wealth and resources while at the same time, religion and culture and ethnical superiority were among the driving factors for the colonization of Africa by European countries. By erasing the local culture and educating the locals about Western culture to achieve the purpose of control and domination, colonialism was a way for Africans to lose their self-identity and cultural self-confidence, making it difficult to establish their own cultural system and values.

Traditional African religions are no more than the following, first, ancestor worship. Most Africans believe that their ancestors are beyond death and live in the spiritual world, and their views on the ancestors' home are not very similar. The second is the worship of a supreme god. They believe in a supreme god who is the master of everything. Finally, there was nature worship. Due to the limitations of the development of the productivity level at that time, people did not have a scientific understanding of the natural world, so Africans turned the harmonious relationship between man and nature into a worship relationship of nature, believing that all kinds of objects in the sky, underground and on earth are not simple natural objects or natural phenomena, but have divinity. Therefore, the gods of the mountains, the earth, the trees, the cows and the snakes were worshipped. It is undeniable to many Africans that African religion has its own independent value as a manifestation of religious thought, but it is ironic that Western-educated Africans have abandoned this religion without knowing anything about it. In other places such as Cuba and Brazil, many people are unsupportive of Christianity and Islam, but prefer traditional African religions precisely because of their profound spiritual character.

The last part of the novel focuses on the wavering of the faith of the native Africans in the face of white aggression, which is in fact the deepest level of spiritual control over the invaded, making them forget their origins, making them forget their roots. This was the usual skill of the invaders in that environment at that time, but it is also shameful is something for which we need to be alarmed as the present. What is national is global, and we should do our part to maintain the cultural specificity of each race.

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