

***In the Name  
of God***



**Vali-e-Asr University of Rafsanjan**  
**Faculty of Humanities**  
**Department of English Literature and Language**

**M. A. Thesis**

**Title of the Thesis:**

**A Jungian Analysis of *Things Fall Apart*: Okonkwo, a  
Failure of Individuation**

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**By**

**Zahra Hosseini**

**A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts**

Evaluated and Approved by the Thesis Committee as .....  
Date: .....

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**To My Family**

**Abstract:**

The Psychology of Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961) offers a valuable means of understanding the tragedy occurring in Chinua Achebe's (1930) *Things Fall Apart* (1958). Okonkwo, the protagonist of the novel, a brave and eminent Igbo man, is led to take his own life at the end, apparently because of the advent of the Western colonization. Many critics put the blame of Okonkwo's demise on European imperialists who come to Igbo and change the course of the traditional life drastically for its people. But, a Jungian analysis reveals that Okonkwo's problems initiate from within his unbalanced and conflicting psyche. The ill-fated start Okonkwo has with an unqualified father makes him take extreme measures in life because of which he develops a rigid and neurotic personality incapable of personal growth and meaning. Okonkwo fails to integrate his shadow and anima into his ego-consciousness. Hence, shadow and anima projections dominate his relationships. As such, he remains a psychological child throughout his life, while his community, Igbo, offers an extremely rich and developed philosophy of life, helping its people gain psychological growth. So, finally, Okonkwo who is unable to adapt himself to the new situation brought about by Western colonization is forced to take his own life, while his balanced society manages to survive against all odds due to its high capacity for leading its people towards the experience of psychological integrity.

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# **PREFACE**

## PREFACE

A great deal of the criticism on *Things Fall Apart* (1958) has focused on the nature of Okonkwo's tragic character. Many have called him a tragic hero in Aristotelian terms, one who ends in demise because of his tragic flaws, and also misfortunes. Those who consider Okonkwo a tragic character name different hamartias for him for example, his propensity to act impulsively and violently without forethought; or his inability to express himself well and as a result, his resort to violence; or his obsessive determination to avoid everything for which he thinks his father stands for, and so denying himself of his father's good qualities. But, Okonkwo's most destructive hamartia is considered to be the way he chooses to interpret narrowly his society's ideals of the 'masculine' and his aggressive disavowing of the culture's 'feminine' values and principles. He has a strong determination to seem very masculine; hence, he forsakes of the qualities of gentleness and softness which he considers to be womanly and effeminate, ignoring the crucial fact that the 'feminine' plays an important part in all aspects of the Igbo society. As such, Okonkwo keeps his feminine qualities in bondage.

The purpose of this thesis is to apply the principles of Jungian Psychology to Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, and so reach to a better understanding of the tragedy befalling Okonkwo. Certainly in what follows this study is not the first to see the tragedy of Okonkwo in terms of his failure to balance the male and female constituents of his personality. But the relation of this to Jung's psychology seems to have gone unnoticed. So, the following study is going to analyze the character

of Okonkwo in the light of Jungian psychology, especially its understanding of the archetypes of shadow and anima, and its application of the process of individuation.

## **Review of Literature**

Lots of books, essays, and dissertations have been written on *Things Fall Apart*, and on Carl Jung's theories as well. There are many works which have applied Jung's psychology and theory of archetypes to different literary works. For instance, Nichole Rae Parkhouse in his M.A. dissertation "A Jungian analysis of Victor Frankenstein" (2000) argues that Frankenstein's relationship with an overbearing mother does not allow proper anima development, because of which his shadow grows unchecked, thereby inflating his ego. According to him, Frankenstein believes that he can generate life by his marvelous creation, but when he finishes it, he projects his shadow material onto it, resulting in his mistreatment of the monster, who, in retaliation, destroys Frankenstein's family and friends and ultimately Frankenstein himself.

Dawn E. Crouse applies Jung's theories to *Beowulf*. In his M.A. dissertation "A Jungian analysis of *Beowulf*" (2007), he delineates the psychological development of Beowulf. He argues that Beowulf progresses from childhood to old age, from an integrated ego, to an undifferentiated ego, and returns to an integrated ego. He progresses through his development as a quest for individuation, completing the cycle that defines Campbell's model of the traditional quest.

But in the case of *Things Fall Apart*, it seems that the relevance of Okonkwo's demise to his unintegrated anima and shadow archetypes has gone unnoticed, though some have related it generally to his psychological problems.

As mentioned earlier, many critics compare *Things Fall Apart* to a Classical Tragedy, and, thus, consider Okonkwo as a tragic hero who is led to an ignominious death by his tragic flaws and reversal of fortune.

Abiola Irele is one of such critics. In his essay “The Tragic Conflict in the Novels of Chinua Achebe” (1967), Irele perceptively mixes psychological insights with a sociological analysis of Okonkwo and his society. According to him, Okonkwo’s problem is a psychological one which originates mainly from his relation to his unsuccessful and effeminate father. Irele describes the problem as such:

In the case of Okonkwo, he is a man who has grown up in a community which, because of its passionate desire for survival, places its face above all in the individual quality of ‘manliness’. And it is an irony of fate that makes Okonkwo start off with a disadvantage on this score – the failure of his own father to satisfy this social norm, which adds urgency to his own particular position. It is need for him to live down the shame of his father that compels to an excessive adherence to the social code to an extent which in fact transforms a value into a weakness. (80)

Irele further argues that by such a bad start in life Okonkwo makes violence as the most desirable attitude for making up for his father’s disgraceful life. His ambition for success becomes a “blinding passion of a pathetic kind” (82) Hence, Okonkwo becomes a tragic character whose principal flaw is his inflexibility in his ambition to reach to the top of the Igbo society. Though, the reversal of fortune hastens his downfall. Irele is of the opinion that besides Okonkwo, tragedy befalls the whole Igbo by the advent of the colonizers. Indeed, Okonkwo’s tragic destiny becomes “a symbolic receptacle, a living theatre of a social dilemma” that befalls Umuofia (79).

Florence Stratton in her book *Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender* (1994) addresses the question of gender ideology in *Things Fall Apart*. She argues that the national and anti-imperialist project of the novel homogenizes African subjectivity, and for this reason, the internal social differentiation based on gender effaces. She states that, though Achebe’s novel tells the tragic consequences of imperialism, and of the destruction of a highly sophisticated and civilized culture, and, thus, tries to restore dignity and respect to the African

people; actually, Achebe does not attempt to restore dignity and self-respect to the African woman.

There is also a stimulating feminist-psychological study of *Things Fall Apart* by Biodun Jeyifo. In his essay “Okonkwo and His Mother” (1983), Jeyifo argues that Okonkwo’s “phallogocentric” suppression of femininity is a function of fundamental male anxiety and insecurity about femaleness of its putative *primal* connection to creativity.

To sum up, there is a wealth of commentary on the character of Okonkwo. Many of them relate his downfall to his suppression of the female principle, and some relate it to Okonkwo’s psychological problems. But no study has still been done to interpret Okonkwo’s tragic destiny in the light of Jungian psychology. It is necessary to mention that the researcher of this thesis has not been able to access new published materials on the subject, although some available abstracts show no sign of having discussed the issue.

## **Methodology**

This study employs an in-detail analysis of a literary figure in the light of Jungian psychology and archetypal criticism. The psychology of Carl Jung offers a valuable means of understanding the tragedy occurring to Okonkwo, especially by its understanding of the archetypes of anima and shadow, and its explication of the process of individuation.

As such, this study is organized into five chapters. The first chapter will be an introduction to Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, and also, Jungian psychology. The second chapter entitled “Individual and Individuation” will be devoted to the explication and clarification of Carl Gustav Jung’s psychology, with special focus on his theory of Individuation. Besides, Jung’s theories on the nature of the human Psych and its functions and dynamics will be elaborated upon, focusing on the necessity of making balance and equilibrium in all aspects of life for maintaining psychological and physical health.

The third chapter of this study, entitled "Igbo Philosophy of Life and the Parameters of Individual Wholeness" will be an interpretive inquiry into Igbo cosmology and philosophy of life, with particular focus on the necessity of making balance as one of the most important Igbo principles of life. By drawing comparisons between the Igbo philosophies of life and Jung's theories on the nature of the human psyche and the ways for having a rich life, it will be argued that the African society presented by Achebe in *Things Fall Apart* is a society with high potentials for leading its individuals to achieve psychological growth.

Chapter four, "Okonkwo, a Failure of Individuation" will be devoted to the analysis of Okonkwo's psychological problems as he takes a one-sided approach to life in his attempt to be an embodiment of masculinity in Igbo. It will be discussed that Okonkwo fails at individuation because he doesn't integrate his shadow and anima into his ego-consciousness. Rather, throughout his life, he remains psychologically a child who is unable to gain personal meaning, losing all chances for improving his personality. Hence, Okonkwo develops a character impervious to change and adaptation; he remains unchanged while his society undergoes a drastic change with the coming of the colonizers.

In the last chapter which will be the conclusion of this study, the significance of the title of the novel, "Things Fall Apart," will be elaborated upon, seeking its relevancy to the destiny of Okonkwo and that of his community. In sum, this study will offer, not only a vantage point on the nature of Okonkwo's demise, but also it will analyze the nature of the well-integrated Igbo philosophy of life, coming at the solid conclusion that Igbo continues to live against all odds because it's a healthy society with the capacity to adapt itself to new situations, while Okonkwo ends in demise as a result of his failure in psychological growth.

**CHAPTER I**  
**INTRODUCTION**

# CHAPTER I

## Introduction

*Things Fall Apart*, Chinua Achebe's first novel is considered by almost all critics to be the most important novel of Africa, both in its own continent and abroad. Almost instantly after its publication it was hailed as a masterpiece, and it has retained this prestige so far. Being sold more than nine million copies up to date around the world, *Things Fall Apart* has been translated into more than fifty languages, "a feat unequalled by any other work of African fiction" (Whittaker, 2007 7). As Isidore Okpewho (1983) remarks, "There are few works outside of the Western canon that have received anything close to the attention given to *Things Fall Apart*, and for good reasons." It is the third most widely-read book after Bible and Quran in Africa (3). And, also outside Africa, Achebe's masterpiece has been the chief source of making people of the world familiar with African identity and culture.

Basically, *Things Fall Apart* is a story about the first encounters between a traditional African (Igbo) community and the British colonialists at the end of the nineteenth century, an encounter which leads to the total change of life for the Igbo people. Achebe depicts the Igbo society as a very complex one, with sophisticated systems of religion and government, a highly developed system of money, as well as a judicial system, which finally cannot withstand the encroachment of the British colonization. The colonizers bring with themselves new systems



of religion, government, and education, and force them upon the Igbo community. Hence, they make “things fall apart” for them.

At the heart of these events lies the story of Okonkwo, a middle-aged man who rises to power and eminence in Umuofia, one of the seven villages of Igbo, only to lose it by the advent of the whites.

*Things Fall Apart* has a tripartite structure: the first part which consists of thirteen chapters, and is by far the longest part, introduces Okonkwo and his family, portrays his conflict with his father and his rise to power, describes the culture and traditions of Umuofians, and concludes with Okonkwo’s exile from his clan; the second part which consists of six chapters, portrays Okonkwo’s life in exile and the initial arrival of the white man, who starts his taking control of the blacks by converting them into Christianity; while the third part, which again consists of six chapters, details Okonkwo’s return from exile, and elaborates on the changes the colonizers have brought about in Umuofia, and ends with Okonkwo’s suicide.

Of course this brief synopsis cannot do justice to the greatness and complexity of Achebe’s novel. The novel which he wrote mostly to give one specific message to the world, that:

... African people did not hear of culture for the first time from Europeans; ...their societies were not mindless but frequently had a philosophy of great depth and beauty and, above all, they had dignity. It is this dignity that many African people all but lost during the colonial period and it is this that they must now regain. (*Morning Yet on Creation Day*, 1975 7)

Achebe is of the opinion that if Africans do not tell their story to the world, their story will be “mistold” by others, as in the case of Joyce Carey’s *Mister Johnson* (1939), a novel in which Africans are portrayed as primitive and backward people who are in great need of Western civilization. So, Achebe wrote *Things Fall Apart*, first and foremost “to help [his] society regain belief in itself and put away the complexes of

the years of denigration and self-abasement.” He tries to teach to his African readers that “their past with all its imperfections was not one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans acting on God’s behalf delivered them” (qout. in Chua 12).

Born into an Igbo family on 16 November 1930 in Ogidi, in what is now eastern Nigeria, Achebe was christened as Albert Chinualumugo Achebe. Both his parents were devout Christians. And, as a result he grew up in an atmosphere which cherished both traditional Igbo and Christian cultures.

Achebe undertook his early education in church schools at Ogidi and Nekede. Since he was a talented student, he was awarded a scholarship to study medicine at the University of Ibadan. But after a year of study, he changed courses to study English literature, Religious studies, and history. And in this way he started reading Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth, Coleridge, and other great English writers. He also read the “African novels” of his time, which were written by authors like Joseph Conrad, Joyce Cary, and Graham Greene. The demeaning and derogatory portrayals of Africans in these novels made him sad, and angry, as well.

After graduating from university, Achebe became an editor for the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation (NBC). He worked there for eight years. It was during his early years working at the NBC that Achebe wrote *Things Fall Apart*. He finally published it in 1958 in London by Heinemann. Afterwards, he published four other novels and a collection of short story and some poems, but none became as great. According to Eustace Palmer (1972), *Things Fall Apart* is unquestionably Achebe’s best work. “Never again was he able to demonstrate such mastery of plot construction, such keen psychological insight, and such ability to hold his themes steadily before his mind and pursue them convincingly to a logical conclusion,” Palmer states (48). Achebe’s other novels are: *No Longer at Ease* (1960), *Arrow of God* (1964), *A Man of People* (1966), and *The Anthills of Savannah* (1987).

A great deal of the criticism on *Things Fall Apart* has focused on the nature of Okonkwo's tragic character. Many have called him a tragic hero in Aristotelian terms, one who ends in demise because of his tragic flaws, and also misfortunes. Those who consider Okonkwo a tragic character name different hamartias for him, for example, his propensity to act impulsively and violently without forethought; or his inability to express himself well, and as a result, his resort to violence; or his obsessive determination to avoid everything for which he thinks his father stands for, and so denying himself of his father's good qualities. But, Okonkwo's most destructive hamartia is considered to be the way he chooses to interpret narrowly his society's ideals of the 'masculine' and his aggressive disavowing of the culture's 'feminine' values and principles. He has a strong determination to seem very masculine; hence, he forsakes of the qualities of gentleness and softness which he considers to be womanly and effeminate, ignoring the crucial fact that the 'feminine' plays an important part in all aspects of the Igbo society. As such, Okonkwo keeps his feminine qualities in bondage.

To portray the depth of the destruction wrought by Western civilization in Africa, Achebe relates the story of Okonkwo. Okonkwo's father, Unoka, is a lazy and effeminate man who is always in debt and for this reason, most of the time his family goes hungry. As a result Okonkwo grows up with a strong determination not to repeat his father's mistakes. Okonkwo, thus, rejects everything for which he believes his father stands for. Unoka is idle, poor, extravagant, gentle, and fond of music and conversation. So, Okonkwo consciously adopts the opposite characteristics. He becomes hard-working, frugal, violent, rich, and intolerant of conversation and music. But he goes to extremes in rejecting his father's qualities. As a result, Okonkwo becomes a violent and impulsive man who regards any sign of gentleness as weakness and, hence avoids it. He has a very strong determination to be a perfect example of manhood in Igbo. And, thus he represses his feminine side in the most aggressive way.

Equally important is Okonkwo's determination to stick to Igbo traditions and customs. Indeed, he has a deep sense of respect for his community's values. But "so extreme is his desire that he might not appear weak, that he might not be like his father... so determined is his effort to be known for achievements which his society reveres," that he breaks the very values he reveres (Iasere, 1998 68). And, finally, because he cannot withstand the presence of colonizers in his clan, Okonkwo resorts to the only solution he knows: violence. Thus, he kills one of the colonizers' messengers, and then desperately takes his own life. Hence, Okonkwo ends his life as he lived it – violently.

The following study is going to analyze the nature of Okonkwo's tragedy in the light of Jungian psychology. Analyzing the character of Okonkwo from a Jungian point of view, it could be argued that he is a person who fails at individuation, the journey of psychological growth. According to Jung, individuation is a journey of self-analysis and self-realization which every individual has the potential to take. The individual must do it if he wants to gain personal meaning and live his life fully. But, this journey is a task of the second half of life. During the first half of life the individual is, and must be, busy with separating from parents and establishing himself in the society as a qualified spouse, parent, contributor, and so on. During the second half of life, by which the individual has become almost free from financial and social considerations, it is time for him to look inside and work on the improvement of his personality, hence setting foot on the road towards individuation.

Jung argued that for individuation to take place, one must resolve one's inner conflicts. He must acknowledge all the conflicting aspects of his personality and try to integrate them into his consciousness. In doing so, the individual will be able to experience life from a more whole point of view, without being controlled by any unintegrated, unconscious aspect of his psyche. Then, it is crucial for the individual to gain a full knowledge of his true self with all its negative and positive aspects to be