

## THE POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF CHINUA ACHEBE'S *THINGS FALL APART* VIS-À VIS MICHAEL WALZER'S POLITICAL ORIENTATIONS.

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### Abstract

*From time immemorial the world has long experimented with and practiced various forms of governmental systems. In Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart a glaring political system, namely 'consensus democracy' stands out. But there are other political features around which consensus democracy would have been developed. Such socio-political features include Communitarianism, Umunna politics and the politics of Ohacracy/Ohakrasi, through egalitarian and equalitarian principles. The Western philosopher, Michael Walzer, may have had as his background for writing the socio-political systems of communitarianism, some ideas of colonialism and imperialism, autocracy and plutocracy, oligarchy and totalitarianism. This comparative study focused primarily on the common political system emphasized by both Achebe and Walzer. They have this preference for democracy, and some stark reasons for the rejection of anti-democratic forms of government, weaved through their basic presuppositions.*

**Keywords:** Chinua Achebe, Michael Walzer, Politics, communitarianism, Democracy.

### Introduction

Could Chinua Achebe of *Things Fall Apart* be possibly compared to Michael Walzer in the light of the latter's contribution in his book, *Spheres of justice: A Defense of Pluralism and Equality* that centers specifically on the principle of *Kommunitarismus*? *Komunitarismus* is a system, which emphasizes the indispensability of the community, especially in its contributive role toward

the realization of societal goods as well as their equitable distribution among its citizens. As a theory, it underscores that a fully integrated individual in a society functions much better than any isolated one. Walzer believes that societal goods should be shared to meet the fairest justice possible, to address complex equality. He further opines that in such a framework, individuals contribute to service the common goods, and equitably share in it; and that a good in one sphere should offer no influence in the other sphere: in a word to guarantee a monopoly-free society. So the answer to the question as to whether Achebe's communitarian framework would compare with Walzer's *Kommunitarismus* must be in the positive. Part of the reason for this is that Achebe's community portends great potential for possible development of the values embodied by the complex societies so described by Walzer. Admittedly, Walzer's model refers to a highly sophisticated and stratified society of modern states and, therefore, cannot literary be compared with Achebe's homogenous society, characterized by its primitive thinking and mentality. However a proper articulation and presentation will show that Achebe's homogenous society, in *Things Fall Apart*, nevertheless, bears a striking relationship to Walzer's visionary model.

The Igbo communitarian system exemplified in *Things Fall Apart* has, as its primary focus, the people's needs: communal solidarity and wellbeing. Thus it rules out the existence of atomic individuals. Achebe describes how the primeval Igbo African society through the Christian mission came under a foreign domination. This external intrusion occasioned what Achebe calls the 'falling apart of things' that cuts across all sectors of the social, cultural, religious and political lives of the people. The idea of colonialism is developed in this paper to show that it falls short as a political system of meeting the ideals championed by Walzer and Achebe in their model society where equity and equality are the watchword.

So whether by Achebe or Walzer, the emphasis is on the community within which the political life of the society revolves and stabilizes. Thus what serves the good of the political community invariably serves the good of the individuals constituting it. Okonkwo as the chief actor in *Things Fall Apart* has a domineering personality. And this is considered antithetical to the spirit of equality, and which portrays a mindset of shortsightedness that fails to see the colonial infiltration as a malevolent spirit that must be confronted through shrewd resistance. This may partly be the reason why the theme of hierarchy is introduced to show that it poses no threat to the idea of equality, since the latter is at the service of the former, at least in ensuring the equitable distribution of communal goods, evident in the recognition and promotion of individual talents and potentials. On the political front, both Achebe and Walzer share similar views that showcase democracy as a preferred model. Thus our paper will adopt the following sequence: First, we shall begin with the basic presuppositions in the political thoughts of Achebe and Walzer. Second, we shall take up democracy as a model political system in Achebe and Walzer. Third, we shall discuss the anti-democratic forms of government in Achebe and Walzer, and fourth, we wrap it up with the conclusion.

### **Basic presuppositions in the political thoughts of Achebe and Walzer**

On reading Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, it is easy to see the motif behind his writing this epoch-making novel. This is a novel that distinguishes him as the father of African novelists. Achebe has often recounted how the reaction provoked by the negative representation of Africa in European literature led to his writing *Things Fall Apart*. For instance, in his analysis of

Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Achebe takes issues with Conrad and labeled him a racist, one who ingeniously propagated poisonous views about Africa by questioning their humanity; and thus encouraged imperial and colonial domination of Africans, an exercise that sparked off the slave trade. As Cott Jonathan (2009: 215-216) noted, Achebe laments that 'At the center of all the problems Europe has had in the perception of Africa lies the simple question of African humanity: are they or are they not? This Achebe blames on Conrad's designation of Africans as possessing rudimentary souls. Conrad devised a simple hierarchical order of souls for the characters in his *Heart of Darkness*. Hence, at the bottom are the Africans whom he calls "rudimentary souls." Above them are the European ivory traders. The Africans are petty, vicious, and morally obtuse; he calls them "tainted souls" or "small souls." And at the top are the regular Europeans and they don't seem to have need for an adjective.'

Similarly, the White missionaries were not fair to the indigenous African society. They made a sweeping condemnation of everything African. This could be seen from the statement ascribed to the District Commissioner in the final chapter of *Things Fall Apart*. On the occasion of the death of Okonkwo, after committing suicide on a tree, the "District Commissioner went away, taking three or four soldiers with him, saying as he went, 'In the many years in which he had toiled to bring civilization to different parts of Africa he had learnt a number of things. One of them was that a District Commissioner must never attend to such undignified details as cutting down a hanged man from the tree. Such attention would give the natives a poor opinion of him. In the book which he planned to write the white district officer hoped he would stress that point. As he walked back to the court he thought about that book. Every day brought him some new material. The story of this man who had killed a messenger and hanged himself would make interesting reading. One could almost write a whole chapter on him, or perhaps, not a whole chapter, but a reasonable paragraph, at any rate. There was so much to include, and one must be firm in cutting out details. He had already chosen the title of the book, after much thought: "The pacification of the primitive Tribes of the lower Niger." (2009: 216).

Commenting on the above statement by the District Commissioner in his "For Achebe: The Resilience and the Predicament of Obierika," J. Abiodun (2009: 496-498) remarks that it captures a case of imperialism of representation – which excludes, or simply ignores alternative versions or constructions from below. A representation of imperialism in the writings of Conrad uses images, distortions, myths and stereotypes of native peoples and cultures to deride a people and justify their enslavement. It is against this backdrop that Achebe designates a writer as a teacher; with the intention of restoring Africa's tarnished image, and to retell the African story from below. An outsider will, perhaps for his own interest, not only present a disjointed story but rather a biased one. Achebe's arguments clearly expose the hypocrisy of Conrad as a racist. (2009: Xx). It requires no equivocation that Conrad by using a concealed language was justifying slavery, imperialism and colonialism in order to push for their implementation on the African continent and its peoples. Achebe, therefore, sets himself up against a certain conception of the writers who are detached from the concerns of the society, when they are not openly antagonistic to it. Achebe adopts a realist method in his narratives. Hence Irele Abiola (2009: Xx) observes that. "The dominant mode of *Things Fall Apart* is realism: the novel creates the illusion that its content corresponds to the

outer world of experience, which becomes essential for re-creating the milieu in which events occur and characters act out their destiny.

Now, a close examination of the standpoint of Walzer will show striking points of convergence as well as areas of divergence that reflect the yawning gap separating the worlds of the authors. As earlier stated, the world Walzer described is heterogeneous in contrast to the homogeneous world of Achebe. His approach and methodology is all embracing as every aspect of justice is minutely and extensively expounded. This portrays him as a putative representative of *Kommunitarismus per excellence*. However their common area of convergence is evident in the philosophy of realism that defines their common outlook on the world around them. The project of both authors is essentially community-oriented, constituting, as it were, a common platform against which any possible comparison between them could be undertaken. It is, for instance, ascribed to M. Walzer (1983: Xii) that the best explanation of reality is to see it as it is, and in its concrete situation here and now, especially as it impresses itself on the viewer. Far from seeing reality from above, from a Platonian standpoint, with the aim of establishing a universal regarding the object, he like Achebe, assumes a realist approach, which confronts the object in its temporality – as it is in everyday experience. Finding his anchor in this, Walzer holds tenaciously to the similarities and dissimilarities in things. Or as he put it, 'We are very different, and we are also manifestly alike. Now what (complex) social arrangements follow from the difference and likeness? This becomes the stepping-stone on which Walzer begins to discuss the concepts of simple and complex equality, and in which he finally discovered the origin of inequalities in the control of sources of domination in one sphere by another, occasioned by competitive access to social goods. Thus he describes political egalitarianism as a society free from domination. And as if re-echoing the stance of Achebe, he outlines his guiding principle thus:

My argument is radically particularistic. I don't claim to have achieved any great distance from the social world in which I live. One way to begin a philosophical enterprise – perhaps the original way – is to walk out of the cave, leave the city, climb the mountain, fashion for oneself (what can never be fashioned for ordinary men and women) an objective and universal standpoint. But I mean to stand in the cave, in the city, on the ground . . . If such a society isn't already here – hidden, as it were, in our concepts and categories – we will never know it concretely or realize it in fact. (1983: Xiv).

### **Democracy as a model political system in Achebe and Walzer**

Humanity has long tried to construct society along varying shades of political structures and arrangements. Such political arrangements may either be dictatorial, autocratic, aristocratic, or plutocratic, and so on. These political structures or arrangements suffer severe shortcomings either because the freedom of the people is not fully respected or that they do not aim at providing the common good needed by the people. In all these systems democracy seems to give a promising hope to the people in terms of delivering democratic dividends by emphasizing two most endearing fundamental principles of freedom and equality. Interestingly, democracy endeavors to recognize and respect the legitimate freedom of every individual in a political community. It also tries to see governance as a collective responsibility aimed at meeting the needs of its members through equal participation in the stream of

governance. A simple definition of democracy is here given as a 'government of the people, by the people and for the people.' The political features in both Achebe and Walzer indicate that no one particular society can operate on pure democratic principles in the sense of the perfect exercise of freedom, equality and participation in governance for all citizens. Walzer observes that democracy must wrestle with re-emerging monopolies in society, namely the social strength of the plutocrats, bureaucrats, technocrats and meritocrats.

The 17<sup>th</sup> century French philosopher, Jean Jacques Rousseau (2002: xiii), made an insightful remark that 'man is free but everywhere in chains: legal, material and psychological. The fact that man may be in chains even in a democratic setup can be interpreted to signal the limitedness of human freedom, a clear indication that democracy does not promise absolute freedom. In *Things Fall Apart*, there is a strong reference by Achebe concerning Igbo consensus democracy that celebrates freedom of speech and expression. Clement Okafor describes what constitutes Igbo consensus democracy as follows

Matters of public concerns are generally discussed at town meetings that are open to every male adult. Although the views of the titled men carry infinitely more weight at such public gatherings, yet, everyone who so desires can express his opinion. Eventually a consensus emerges through a reconciliation of the competing viewpoints; whereupon, the consensus becomes the view of the entire community and is, thereafter, expected to be implemented without dissent. (2002: 122).

There is no gainsaying the fact that freedom of speech and opinion is paramount in democracy. This is particularly true of Walzer who believes that there is no alternative to democracy, as this may be a sure way of arriving at decisions affecting a political society. In his book, *Sphere of Justice: A Defense of Pluralism and Equality* he acknowledges that a political community is "... also a common enterprise, a public place where we argue together over the public interest, where we decide on goals and debate acceptable risks". (1983: 30). Granted that Walzer has a modern state in view as he reflects, its parallel can be seen in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* where also it is considered a great honor to have a voice in a political society. At some crucial moments in the novel, Okonkwo was visibly concerned, because he could not live to bear the thought of having a son (Nwoye) with no political voice in the gathering of *Umunna*. The word 'Umunna' stands for the male folk entrusted with decision-making within the Igbo community or town.

In his article with the title "Assessing Colonial Evil through Igbo (African) Experience in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*," C. Okoro (2020) writes that it is 'egalitarianism' and 'equalitarianism' that give fine texture to Igbo consensus democracy. He explains that egalitarianism cares for equality of all peoples, their rights and opportunities. This is to say that it does not give preference to any social standing where this exists. While equalitarianism means that everybody is given equal opportunity and receives equal encouragement to develop self and achieve success. Thus, in this political framework there is no 'unitary hierarchical principle' - which expresses the fact that the Igbo do not have kings. It is a system that maintains checks and balances through a number of juxtaposed groups. The different age groups, which characterize the Igbo society of Achebe, are established as veritable networks for furthering the interests of the groups in question and the society at large. These groups

while pursuing their respective interests respect the rule of the game and are regulated by cultural cum moral values of hard work and honesty among others. In her publication 'Achebe and duality in Igbo thought,' A. C. Kalu (2002: 69) observes that Igbo thought and philosophy had a built-in egalitarian outlook in terms of government, freedom of artistic expression and other freedoms. And that the elders who assumed and exercised ancestral roles could not have easily or even willingly stopped their children from learning the ways of the strangers who came to live among them. Life's temporal goal may be pinned to self-development and success achievement. This is achievable in an atmosphere of freedom.

When it is said that the Igbo political arrangement is devoid of hierarchy or that status does not give one an edge over others, what it means is that power or its exercise is at the service of the good of humanity. The country, Switzerland remains exemplary. Her democracy is unique in the sense that it practices a democracy, whereby, seven potential presidents are elected at a time, and they take turns, i.e. rotational to govern on a yearly basis. The underlying reason I should think is to reduce 'power intoxication and influence.' This moderates highhandedness in politics and to encourage mass participation. Then, the whole idea is to directly involve the people in what is called 'direct democracy.' And this may have been responsible for the relative peace in their country. According to C. Okoro (2020), direct democracy conceives power as an instrument of service that empowers the masses to participate in matters affecting them politically. This sort of democracy, however, is much more complex than what we have in *Things Fall Apart*, and it bears slightly comparable elements to that of Walzer's (1983: 281-284) modern democratic system with its emphasis on sovereignty and blocked powers; and in which the 'overbearingness' of officials as agents of sovereignty is considered a threat to liberty, an affront to equality and egalitarianism. The point that Walzer purports to underscore is that any truly democratic system should gravitate around the three-pronged fulcrum of liberty, equality and egalitarianism. In like manner the Igbo hierarchical structure far from constituting a hindrance to equality plays a vital role in ensuring societal equilibrium as well as a conflict-free society through equitable creation and sharing of goods. It must be admitted that democracy no matter how highly praised often coexists along anti-democratic principles. We shall now take a look at some of these aberrations.

### **The anti-democratic forms of government in Achebe and Walzer**

The following text from W. B. Yeats reveals the source of Achebe's inspiration.

Turning and turning in the widening gyre  
The falcon cannot hear the falconer.  
Things fall apart; the center cannot hold:  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world

The central point of the third part in Achebe's novel is the conflict of cultures provoked by the introduction of Christianity in Igboland with its telling consequences. Of interest to us is the observation made by the people about this august visitor, precisely in chapter eighteen of the novel. It was about stories that circulated around the Whiteman that came bringing his government along with his religion. The essence of the story is to establish the connection between the advent of Christianity and colonial rule. The general sense of the term colonialism here means the establishment, exploitation, maintenance, acquisition and expansion of

colonies in one territory by the people of another territory. The people's resistance to colonial infiltration shows that its incursion raised great tension. The Igbo are a unique people.

On inquiry the colonial Lords were taken aback when they found out that the people lacked any central government or king, which seemed to make the work of coordination relatively difficult. Nonetheless, this does not bespeak the idea that the people lacked the concept of kingship in their culture. More light will be cast on this later. Apart from this, the people are naturally wise and knowledgeable. It dawned on the colonial Lords that the people could not easily be controlled. Meanwhile, Achebe's treatment of the missionaries and the coming of the Whiteman is a historical critique of colonialism. The same criticism is meted out to colonialism's twin wayfarer, religion, by Chinelo, in *The Priestess of the Gods of Hills and Caves*, wherein Christianity is pictured as a "mad-dog" that would devour the clan. McClaren Joseph (2002: 103) shared a similar view, depicting it as 'an analysis of the way European Christianity affected traditional Igbo religion and political power.' The church, it has happened, can sometimes be cowed by state power to maintain silence in matters touching on the dignity of man, as is clear in the cooperation that the missionaries gave to the colonizers in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*.

In his book, *Sphere of Justice: A Defense of Pluralism and Equality*, M. Walzer harps on colonialism as he discusses on sovereignty and limited government: Sovereignty is not simply one among the goods that men and women pursue; as state power, it is also the means by which all the different pursuits, including that of power are regulated. (1983: 281).

True, democracy worth the name must rest on a solid ground of sovereign power as a characteristic feature of all modern states, capable of self-government and self-determination. It equally takes for granted that such a sovereign authority should be able to exercise power through the enactment and enforcement of humane laws for good governance. Democracy may, however, fall short of upholding its principles as when a state power is colonized according to Walzer. The problem lies on colonizing state power:

State power is colonized by wealth or talent or blood or gender; and once it is colonized, it is rarely limited. Alternatively state power is itself imperialist; its agents are tyrants in their own right. They don't police the spheres of distribution but break into them; they don't defend the social meanings but override them. This is the most visible form of tyranny. . . (1983: 282).

There is a constant temptation in our age among the Igbo to colonize state power by a few individuals (cabals) who may have privileged access to governance. The partisan and familial spirit is so domineering in our politicking nowadays, so much so that it dictates and influences impartial distribution of goods and services on account of preferential treatments. Democracy, rightly viewed must care for the common good of all the peoples without discrimination. It must engender an atmosphere of freedom as well as close the yawning gap of inequality between peoples. Its primary focus must be the promotion of equal participation of all in politics, and must be disposed to hunt for talents and their development for the common good. These ideals must be promoted as humanity struggles to free itself from the clutches of

tyrannical individuals and governments. Okonkwo, being the hero in *Things Fall Apart* exerted much opposition against the colonial administration, a radical attitude that may indicate 'genuine quest for freedom and autonomy.' By extension, this may represent the genuine longing for Africans to free their continent from the long years of foreign domination, exploitation and imperialism or from what has long been termed the 'scramble for Africa' by foreign powers. The struggle to stop this dehumanization must be backed up by reasons for which all hands must be on deck to defend.

### **Reasons for the rejection of anti-democratic rules in Achebe and Walzer**

There are indications of aversion for anti-democratic rules in both Achebe and Walzer. The reasons are not far-fetched. The story told Ezinma by her mother Ekwefi in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* about the Tortoise and the rest of the animals on a sky-journey has a political undertone of a leader or king who may have been abandoned by his subjects; simply on the ground of not adequately representing their interest and well-fare. The Tortoise has, before the commencement of the sky-journey, borrowed wings from the winged animals. Cunningly, he has equally asked them to take up names that would facilitate their identification on arrival. He himself took up the name 'All of you.' This name would later mean that the Tortoise has the right to claim for himself whatever is presented and meant for all the animals. Angered by this treatment, the other animals demanded their wings back from the Tortoise; which made it impossible for him to fly back to where they came from. Parrot, one of the birds, then agreed to deliver a message to the wife of Tortoise. But there was a ruse – to the effect that the latter brought out hard and sharp objects, instead of bring out all the soft things or materials in the house and spread them everywhere on the compound, so that by falling on them, the Tortoise might not break his shell. Indeed, he did break his shell by falling on the dangerous hard surface. The story ends by noting that the Tortoise's body remains rough till date on account of his shattered shell. Often such stories by the Igbo, even though, cast in animal characters represent human beings. The abandonment of the Tortoise by the birds after asking back their feathers is understood in the sense of a leader who receives the mandate of the people, and who, because he fails to represent the people by way of identifying with their political interests and well-being; now suffers the agony of abandonment; on account of the people's withdrawal of their mandate, which is signaled by demanding back the borrowed wings. There is also a clear indication of the people's high sense of responsibility based on their perception of egalitarian principle, equity and fairness. Indeed, where justice and equity fail, there is little to be expected in terms of peace and stability as it relates to the smooth functioning and ordering of any political society.

The story no doubt captures the elements of domination, cheating, monopoly, subjugation and injustice; which are associated with autocratic rule, a condition that automatically would lead to the breakdown of law and order; and which would eventually usher in anarchy. The Tortoise is superbly gifted with oratorical power, which speaks of his distinctive endowment, predisposing him to lead and govern. But to exercise power only to seek what redounds to one's favor and advantage – simply by the sheer possession of glibness in speech and intelligence – instead of pursuing the collective interest of the majority will amount to an abuse of special endowment. of course, Walzer would agree with Achebe based on this interpretative reading of the above story. Then power is a value that should not be hoarded what more employed to seek one's undue advantage to the detriment of others. It defeats



essentially, at least in principle, the primary goal of any political entity. Thus, Walzer has argued extensively against the right to govern; to arrogate power to oneself on the strength of one's special possession of knowledge or any of such characteristics. He opines that the exercise of democratic power should be done by all who share the life of any political community. He further maintains that, "All arguments for exclusive rule, all anti-democratic arguments, if they are serious, are arguments of special knowledge." Further he was vehement in stating that those who experience its effects should put such in check. He then dismisses the democratic ship of Plato, who arguing from special knowledge puts the helmsman as the governor of the ship, and by extension that of the state. Continuing, Walzer notes that Plato's analogy falls short of capturing what a true political power should mean. Walzer, who shares the same political vision with R. Brambrough (1967: 105), has, for instance, seen in Plato's analogy difference between the choice of a policy by a politician and the choice of a destination by the owner or passengers of a ship. He claims that the crucial qualification for exercising political power is not some special insight into human ends but some special relation to a particular set of human beings. The implication of Brambrough's statement above according to Walzer is that, government policy should revolve around what politicians and pilots know regarding the needs of the people. Hence, Plato's arrogation of governing power to philosophers holds no water any longer in the light of Walzer's analysis. His vehement opposition to the exercise of power as a prerogative of the people with special knowledge could be seen in the irreconcilable ends to which this leads. Against Plato's stand on the possession of special knowledge as a prerogative faculty to govern, Walzer turns the other side of the coin, and says, that "technical knowledge itself constitutes a power over and against sovereignty, to which we all bow, even though we are democratic citizens..." The proponents of special knowledge fail to grasp the undemocratic loophole of their position in which they bar their inmates full participation in decision-making, even (or particularly) in emergencies.

Democracy has always followed the electoral process in ushering eligible candidates to governance. It is clear that the people with special knowledge came to the political arena through search, and not necessarily by being elected. This, according to Walzer, is undemocratic. And as the saying goes, 'power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely; in that case the negative consequence of special knowledge can heat the polity and breed arrogance and tyranny. Thus, Walzer reasons that the captain of the ship, even though he steers or commands the ship, has limits to what he can do, and which necessarily requires that he brings the ship to its very destination. One way to make power brokers not to exceed their limits will be to make the exercise of power less attractive. How can this be realized? Those politicians whose stock in trade is to loot public treasure can be controlled through a carefully monitored checks and balances, and through political enlightenment that awakens the people to their rights and duties in the polity. Politics has its 'myths.' One such myth is 'god-fatherism.' Another is the myth of elimination, i.e., the politics of do or die.

Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* shows a people in genuine struggle to free themselves from the dominance of the mythical through the combined influences of the primitive gods and men as agents of order in society. The first order is to preserve life and to live in peace with everyone. That the Igbo hold to the sacredness of life is incontestable (See Emedolu 2018, pp.9-28). No violent hand against another could be raised; the only exception may be the option for

war as the last resort; and this happens when there is obvious threat to the cooperate existence of the people. The Igbo have a saying; 'Let the stranger not kill us with his visit so that when he goes he may not carry a swollen back.' The meaning is that when it is perceived that the presence of a stranger or his acts may seriously put the cooperate existence of the people in jeopardy; it may be deemed legitimate to either 'do away' with him or ask to him to leave the people in peace. All this may explain the reasons for the killing of both Ikemefule and the messenger in *Things Fall Apart*.

Thus, both the religion and government of the Whiteman were perceived as a threat, a lunatic, a 'mad dog' capable of wiping out the entire Igbo race. It is even reported that after the killing of the messenger by the people of Abame, as a punitive measure, almost the entire village was wiped out through violent execution on a popular market day, when the market was filled to capacity. This is a legitimate fear, for what happened to Abame could lead to an ethnic extirpation of a people. M. Horkheimer and T. Adorno ((2002: Xviii) would describe this sort of act as barbarous, and the height of primitivism in the use of force to destroy life and property, in a world that prides itself of being enlightened. This view is contained in their co-authored book, *Dialectic of Enlightenment, Philosophical Fragments* in which they lamented that 'myth is already enlightenment, and that enlightenment now reverts to mythology.' This obviously speaks of the context of domination and killing of the primitive Igbo people in Achebe's novel. With the brute force in place, thanks to the British colonial Lords, life is no longer sacred, the culture of life is replaced by the culture of death, might becomes right and right becomes might; the culture of dialogue to resolve conflicts gives way to might to command acceptance and obedience.

A look at the Igbo judicial system of government reveals a unique way that Egwugwu masquerade mediates in the affairs of public and private interests. Each of the nine Egwugwu masquerades represented the village ancestors. The Egwugwu are otherwise regarded as the spirits of the ancestors, often referred to as custodians of cultural life and values, the arbiters in social and political matters; evidenced in the case between Uzowulu and Odukwu. (Irele, 55-6). The remarkable way Evil Forest, the leader of the Egwugwu settled a marital dispute over wife beating, by first hearing from the two sides to the dispute before giving final decision, is exemplary. The context points to the honor and esteem in which women are culturally held, and how critically the community looks upon violence against women. This indicates also the culture of fairness and equity as well as the commitment to root out the culture of lordship and brutality against any segment of the society. The difference becomes clearer, when we juxtapose the treatment of the leaders of Umuofia by the District Commissioner with the familial case settlement by Egwugwu group. Scarcely had the District Commissioner finished interrogating the elders than he got them handcuffed and imprisoned, and demanded huge sums of money before freeing them. The District Commissioner was credited with saying; 'we have brought a peaceful administration to you and your people so that you may be happy.' (Irele, 109). A peaceful administration would then be understood as one which guarantees that everyone is equally and respectfully treated, except perhaps those considered by the British administration as primitive and irrational, i.e., the colonized. At the root of all this is the politics of discrimination. Operationally, there is some form of arbitrariness in offering unequal access to power for those who learn English and the rejection as irrational, those who do not do so.

Further the administration's sense of justice is defined by injustice. The irony here is that it seems that justice can only be delivered by injustice. Perhaps lawyers may acquiesce to this. For it is the same promise of justice and equity, which denied fair-hearing to the elders of Umuofia, who were summoned, handcuffed and imprisoned, and who must pay a huge penalty with a bribe attached. It is a big mistake to hope for peace when there is a miscarriage of justice. The District Commissioner's intent as a bringer of happiness remains suspect. But even if there is some kind of happiness (which remains doubtful), such can only be measured against the backdrop of the violent intrusion that released terrible tears in most homes, and with its far-reaching cultural and socio-political consequences in Nigerian state. One would surmise also that another reason for the non-acceptance of anti-democratic rule in Achebe is the truncation of Igbo belief and philosophy; a philosophy that places much premium on the community over the individual. The Igbo people usually say, 'Igwe bu ike,' (meaning: Unity is strength) or as the Germans would say, *Zusammen schaffen wir*. Regrettably this bond of unity among the Igbo will soon begin to wear off, which is described by Achebe as putting a knife to what held us together, namely our family and community ties as well as our socio-political bonds. A. C. Kalu captures this as follows.

In his use of the Yeatsian metaphor, "Things Fall Apart, the center cannot hold," the artist of the new dispensation foresees the imbalance in the African communities, a consequence of the emerging postcolonial reality, independence and subsequent acceptance of alienating notions of individuality over community. When things fell apart, communities could no longer grant their staffs of justice to individuals because in the new dispensation, the main character is the individual who holds the staff rather than the characters of justice, harmony and peace as inviolable responsibilities of the community. (Irele, 70).

The anthropological view that man is a gregarious animal, a community-seeking being, a being destined for belongingness and a being for others has a deep significance for the Africans and particularly the Igbo. In his *African Religions and Philosophy*, J. S. Mbiti (1970: 108) expressed the African communitarian identity as follows: 'I am because we are, and because we are, therefore I am.' It is a socio-political society where the community is considered prior to the individual, and where the community bears responsibility over the development of individual's potentials. It is a community that has common identity and belongingness as its distinctive marks, expressible in strong family ties that engender peace and cohesiveness. But if the individual were considered prior to the community, for sure, both the Igbo Communitarian project of Achebe and Walzer's *Kommunitarismus* would automatically crumble. We are not here to settle the arguments on both sides, regarding which is prior, the community or the individual. However it might be a helpful insight to hold that it is the community that is prior, given the fact that it behooves the community to generate an individual at birth. What this means is that no man or woman taken singly can generate a new born or individual alone. Rather it takes the coming together of man and woman in conjugal union or relationship to generate new life. Then, in that wise, it makes much sense to say that the community is prior to the individual. Because of the vital role the family plays in the formation of democratic citizens, there is need to checkmate negative parental influences on

their wards, so as to ensure the production of democratic citizens on the platform of equality and egalitarianism. The place of the family institution is relevant to both Achebe and Walzer, and especially, because of its connection to town-formation, considered as the base for democratic politics. Hence, according to Walzer (1983: 214-225), “people are most likely to be knowledgeable and concerned, active and effective, when they are close to home, among friends and familiar enemies.” Achebe echoes the same thought in his contract theory as he adduces the following reasons for the rejection of kingship by the Igbo:

My world – the one that interests me more than any other – is the world of the village. It is one, not only, reality, but it’s the one that the Igbo people, who are my people, have preferred to all others. It was as if they have the choice of creating empire or cities or large communities and they looked at them and said, No we think that what is safest and best is a system in which everybody knows everybody else” In other words a village. So you will find that, politically, the Igbos preferred the small community; they had nothing to do – until recently – with kings and kingdoms. Now I am quite convinced that this was a conscious choice. Some people look at the Igbos and assert that they didn’t evolve to the stage of having kings and kingdoms. But this isn’t true – the Igbos have a name for “king, “they have names for all the paraphernalia of kingship – it isn’t as if they didn’t know about kings. I think it’s simply that, looking at the way the world operates, they seemed to have said to themselves, “of all the possible political systems, we shall insist on the one where there are only so many people.” (2002: 335).

## **Conclusion**

Our excursus into the comparative analysis of the political implications of Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* and Michael Walzer’s political orientations have revealed that great minds think alike. Achebe describes that a people, though primitive and undeveloped, have the ken to organize themselves politically along democratic lines. The same point reverberates in Walzer, who maintains that equitable distribution of societal goods is best carried out in a democratic setting, though, not without its difficulties. Igbo society gives deference to the holders of titles. Considered as a value, acquiring a title adds a feather to the recipient, and thus elevates his public image. However, the acquisition of a title remains open to all members of the society. This makes it ‘a non-discriminatory-conflict-free value.’ Thus, Okonwo’s revered position as wrestling champion, after throwing Amalinze, the cat is a case in point. There is another value, which is the promotion of natural endowments and talents. After reading *Things Fall Apart* in 1985, Charles Okoro was struck to conduct an interview with the oldest man in his village, by name Sunday Alugburu. The intention was to get some glimpse into the Igbo past of Chinua Achebe’s time. The outcome was quite informative. According to him, “when any of our sons and daughters is observed to have an exceptional talent, it could be one with an extraordinary intelligence, what the community does is to sell either a communally owned land or harvest a communally owned palm-fruits, and with its proceeds; such a brilliant chap can be considered eligible for overseas training, and the journey sponsored by the community.” The understanding behind this initiative derives from the common belief that no-one particular person owns a child, that is to say, every child belongs to the community, which means every child embodies in itself the seed and the ideals of

communality. It becomes then the responsibility of the community to dictate this good child, to nurture and enhance the flowering for the common good. The cultivation of intellectual endowments of its members falls in place when juxtaposed with Walzer's creation of values, in this instance, intellectual value. This says, in a word, that it is the common good that inspires the recognition and promotion of intellectual value or any other value needed by the community. It is reasonable, therefore, to say that the cultivation and harvesting of the 'strengths and talents' of the individual members of the society lie at the root of socio-political and economic power of any nation.

Interestingly, Achebe remarked, right at the opening chapter of his novel that the measure of selecting any individual is based on merit. Unfortunately, the ensuing colonial government would not permit the sustenance of this mode of distributing honor to deserving persons. This may be part of the reason that Okonkwo spared no strength to fight this violator of what is genuinely meant for human development and good, colonialism. However, Okonkwo deserves some portion of blame. He failed to adopt the right approach to register his grievance, especially, by way of dialogue. His temperament may have been his undoing. He suffers from shortsightedness that he could not decipher the right moment to give up, judging from his dogmatic stance. *Things Fall Apart* prefigures, as it were, the political consequences of colonial intrusion for the future of Nigerian politics. The political instability in Nigeria could be tagged, the direct consequence of the British colonial rule. Colonial invasion, for real, inaugurated an era of the use of force to command legitimacy, obedience and acceptance of unjust unauthorized government; hence the emergence of military dictatorships that interrupted the smooth running of republican rule in Nigeria. The remnants of this could be strongly felt till date. It may be considered the strongest reasons for the wobbling democratic government in Nigeria. The Nigerian politicians still adopt military disposition and mentality in dealing with civilians and civil matters. There is lack of vision for the common good, respect for the rule of law, fairness, and political will to deliver dividends of democracy. This is an abuse of office but it can also be seen as the emptying of power and authority of its social meaning, according to Walzer. Also, the missionary activity and influence deserve some comment. Because the missionaries were close to the people in the villages, the colonizers may have used them as special agents to know their ins and outs. Such information about the market day in Abame may have leaked out through the instrumentality of an insider, like the missionaries. This is the day chosen by the British administration to extirpate the entire people through reckless and indiscriminate shootings. It is on record that religion has sometimes co-operated with unjust governments to perpetuate dastardly acts against humanity.

Some church leaders still face the same temptation to take up an unholy duty of prophesying for and championing the course of some political candidates against the desired choice of the people during elections. Religion should do well to dissociate itself from politics, without shying away from the socio-political role of its missionary mandate. All human institutions are fraught with imperfections. Democracy is one such institution. No matter how gallantly it prides itself of being the vanguard for the defense of equality and liberty, it constantly fails to achieve these ideals in the concrete. Despite its exaggerated emphasis on egalitarianism, the Igbo republican version of consensus democracy is grossly criticized for sidelining women in politics. The negative attitude exhibited by Okonkwo toward his wives, in the reported case of wife beating, and the use of gun as a threat during the week of peace speaks eloquently that

women are not equally rated as their men counterparts. However, there are indications that women are not so relegated as imagined. R. Cobham (2002: 28) captures Achebe's designation of a powerful women group, namely the *Umuada*, or daughters of the clan that exercised great political influence within the enclave of Igbo community. Comparatively, women portray more elegant style of leadership when it comes to governing and execution of policies. This is why Cobham levels a powerful critique against Achebe, accusing him of making serious omission, for not reporting a historical event – the Aba women's riot – which happened within the time-frame of *Things Fall Apart*; she claims that it was precisely the outbreak of the women's riot in Aba in 1929, that gave unprecedented resistance –the one that formidably challenged the colonial authority in living memory among the Igbo. It was this incident that motivated the British colonial government to release research grants to colonial anthropologists to study Igbo culture. Although Achebe did not *per se* mention this event, he, however, gave hints about it toward the end of *Things Fall Apart*, precisely at the mention of the proposed book that the District Commissioner wished to write with the title: 'The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the lower Niger' (Irele, 117). Indeed, Igbo women are not passive observers in politics. Whether by Achebe or Walzer, any government that fails to recognize the political liberty of all its citizens, their equality, and their unimpeded access to common goods may not pass the litmus test of legitimacy and acceptance as a political system of modernity. This is why the colonial government in Achebe's novel is pictured as a destructive factor of Igbo consensus democracy among others.

However unlike most social contract theorists that advocate for a return to the state of nature, Achebe did not see this need. Culture is essentially dynamic. Every Cultural Revolution, as it were, brings with it a process of 'value metamorphosis'. The negative effects of colonialism notwithstanding, there are some perceived advantages of its advent, namely the Whiteman's education, hospital, abolition of Osu Caste system, stoppage of the killing of twins, and an eventual promotion of commercial trades, among others. These advantages do not, however, justify colonialism; then evil must not be committed so that the good may be generated. Although Africa is relatively independent from colonial domination, the battle is not yet over, especially, in the face of continuing influence of imperialism and neocolonialist strategies for the rape of African economies.

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