

From Colonization to Imperialism

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Colonization occurred throughout history as countries tried to build their empires, expand their influence, and exert dominance over trading systems. European expansion in the form of colonization occurred from the 15th century to the 20th century (Bernstein, 2000, 247). The impacts of European colonization can be seen today in a different form, commonly called imperialism. Imperialism can be defined as “a general system of domination by a state (or states) of other states, regions or the whole world” that “encompasses different kinds of indirect control” (Bernstein, 2000, 241). This quote demonstrates that imperialism involves domination using a variety of methods as opposed to neo-colonialism which focuses on economic goals. The book, *Things Fall Apart*, by Chinua Achebe, discusses the beginnings of colonialism and its effects on the Igbo culture in Nigeria and offers a lens through which to view the effects. These effects, which include economic restructuring, the taking of political power from Indigenous people, and the fragmenting influence of outsider cultures, were not only limited to the colonial period but through imperialism were extended into the modern-day.

The first major type of change that occurred in this book when the colonizers arrived was economic restructuring. The initial change that occurred was the commodification of land which altered the structure of inheritance (Achebe, 1959, 176). This was a move away from traditional economic systems of inheritance and common land, to a system of capitalism and enclosures. The land was no longer freely available, or common, and it made it harder for individuals to own large plots of land, or inherit the land (Bernstein, 2000, 244). The subsequent change was the introduction of a store. This allowed people to sell their palm-oil and kernels for a price (Achebe, 1959, 178). This changed the structure of the economy because it meant that they were no longer growing food for subsistence purposes only, but for income. This meant they would have begun

to rely on the store to buy food for consumption that they were no longer growing independently (Hogan, 2013). This increased their reliance on British institutions and prevented self-sufficiency (Hogan, 2013). These changes drastically altered the way that the Igbo people had been living and were made permanent through imperialism.

This is seen today through the influence of the International Monetary Fund or IMF. The IMF is an international organization that provides loans to countries and often mandates the adoption of economic liberalization (Taylor, 2017, 166). The IMF will often mandate structural adjustments where in order to receive loans, a country must abandon traditions and trade globally (Taylor, 2017, 167). The British brought in these ideals when they colonized the Igbo through the commodification of land which removed traditional practices, and the introduction of a store that introduced global trade. The programs, aimed at development, were unsuccessful and resulted in the loss of self-sufficiency, and traditional systems (Taylor, 2017, 174). The IMF today functions as an imperial organization as it perpetuates inequality between the colonized and colonizers.

The second major type of change that occurred in *Things Fall Apart* when the colonizers arrived was the removal of power from Indigenous people. These changes affected Igbo culture as they were no longer able to be self-sufficient and rule based on traditions (Achebe, 1959, 194). The first removal of power was within their traditional punishment systems. This is apparent in the story of Enoch, a man who sinned against their traditional religion (Achebe, 1959, 190). The leaders of the clan attempted to punish him in their traditional way but were instead punished by the British (Achebe, 1959, 194). This demonstrates that the Igbo people were no longer able to exercise power over their judicial system, and instead this system was controlled by the British. The second removal of power was that traditional hierarchies were removed. Within Igbo society, hierarchy is based on age and titles (Achebe, 1959, 123). When the British arrived they

cast aside these hierarchies and allowed people who were previously outcasts to integrate into the church and society (Achebe, 1959, 156). This upset the structure that the Igbo had created and it threatened their political organization and rule. Today, the colonizers no longer rule directly, but this rule is replaced with international organizations and imperialism.

One way that political rule still is imposed on post-colonial countries is through interference in their criminal system, through the International Criminal Court (ICC). When Africa was colonized colonial powers repressed the traditional systems and used the criminal system as a means of social control (Weldesellasi, 2017, 248). The statute that created the ICC entered into force in July 2002 and it was established to prosecute egregious international crimes (Jalloh. & Bantekas, 2017, 1). To be involved in the ICC countries need to agree to cede their sovereignty over particular criminal cases (Clarke, 2019, 1). This ceding of sovereignty is done mainly by African nations, as countries of the first world, including the United States, refuse to cede their sovereignty (Clarke, 2019, 2). This means that the ICC, while international and agreed to by many countries, is only functional in African countries. The ICC has pursued twenty-two cases in African states but refused to prosecute a case of war crime committed in Afghanistan by the United States Military (Clarke, 2019, 2). African leaders have come to see this organization as a continuation of colonization and external control in the form of imperialism as the ICC is controlled by colonizing nations, but mainly affects post-colonial African nations (Clarke, 2019, 3). This is similar to the book in that the people are no longer free to rule themselves, as their systems had been removed, but the British took over and asserted their own rule. Due to the ICC specifically interfering in the judicial systems of post-colonial countries, while ignoring the atrocities committed by western nations, this organization should be seen as imperialist.

The third major type of change that the Igbo people experienced after the colonizers arrived was the fragmenting influence of outsider cultures. The first cultural change occurred when the British outsiders introduced Christianity (Achebe, 1959, 148). This removed religious homogeneity in the community and introduced a new set of values. Before British intervention, the Igbo had one religion, but after intervention, religious practices were fragmented (Achebe, 1959, 15). The second cultural change that occurred was the introduction of a state education system, similar to that of Britain (Achebe, 1959, 182). This education system was not consistently accessible and resulted in some people having improved employment opportunities, while others maintained traditional lives (Achebe, 1959, 182). The introduction of a religion and a schooling system created fragmentation within the Igbo community and the British rulers supported individuals who adapted to British systems. Today, through imperialism, countries that adhere to western expectations are offered more support and assistance.

One way that cultural imperialism occurs today is through the support of countries like Israel who adhere to western values. The US (United States) and Israel have what is considered a special relationship. This means that they are in a relationship that offers benefits commonly accepted by both countries. The US provides military, economic, political and aid-based support while Israel supports the US's middle east foreign policy and defers to US requests (Bar-Siman-Tov, Y, 1998, 231). This is an asymmetrical relationship as the US controls the terms (Bar-Siman-Tov, Y, 1998, 232). This is similar to the relationship in the book that the British had with those who converted to Christianity or were involved in schooling as they supported individuals who adopted their values. In the case of Israel, the US supports them because they agree to support US foreign policy (Bar-Siman-Tov, Y, 1998, 232). This relationship can be seen

as a form of imperialism as the US controls Israel indirectly by withholding funds, and forces them to create a certain foreign policy that is amenable to the US.

The book *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe is a foundation point for the study of colonialism. It provides insight into life before colonialism and how early colonialism affected the Igbo people and culture. Although the British colonizers left Nigeria after World War Two, the impacts of colonialism are seen today and can be placed into three categories. Economic restructuring was seen in the book through the commodification of land and the introduction of a store and can be seen in the modern-day through the influence of the IMF. The loss of power of Indigenous people was seen in the book through the removal of traditional punishment systems and the replacement of traditional hierarchies, and it can be seen today through the ICC. Fragmentation due to the influence of outsider cultures was seen in the book as the British introduced Christianity and a state education system, while today it can be seen through manipulative special relationships, like that of the United States and Israel. Changes that were seen through colonialism were continued through imperialism as colonizing countries continued to exert their influence on post-colonial nations. This interference should be called imperialism, rather than neocolonialism, as the influence extends far beyond economic goals. The goals include both economic in terms of the IMF, political, through the ICC and culture through special relationships with specific countries. These countries did not change the outcomes of their influence from the colonial period, they only changed the vessel in which this influence was delivered, as they moved from direct rule to the power of international organizations and relationships. This book can be seen as the starting point of a colonial history that still has not ended.

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