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"If one finger brought oil, it soiled the others": The Ideas of Cultural Orthodoxy and Critique and Subjectivity and Friendship in Things Fall Apart

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**“If one finger brought oil, it soiled the others”: The Ideas of Cultural Orthodoxy and
Critique and Subjectivity and Friendship in *Things Fall Apart***

By

Michael L. Katz

A Thesis

**Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Honors
Bachelor of Arts Degree**

**Department of English
In the College of Arts and Sciences
University of Redlands
May 2011**

Thesis Approval

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**A Thesis Submitted in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of
Honors Bachelor of Arts
In the Field of English**

Approved by:

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**College of Arts and Sciences
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May 2011**

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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.

Perhaps not a whole chapter but a reasonable paragraph at any rate...He had already chosen the title of the book, after much thought: *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger*. (*Things* 117)

Chinua Achebe's classic novel *Things Fall Apart* concludes with the above lines.

The protagonist of the book, Okonkwo, has committed suicide, and upon finding the body, the English District Commissioner of the Lower Niger thinks that "this man," who has had a whole book written about him, does not merit an entire chapter written about him (*Things* 117). In thinking this, the District Commissioner enters into one of the great conflicts between the West and Africa: the assumption that Africans have no sense of self, and, consequently, are not viable subjects (*Writer* 51-57).

Writing about this, Achebe states:

In the area of literature, I recall that we have sometimes been informed by the West and its local zealots that the African novels we write are not novels at all because they do not quite fit the specifications of that literary form which came into being at a particular time in specific response to the new spirit of individual freedom set off by the decay of feudal Europe and the rise of capitalism. This form, we were told, was designed to explore individual rather than social predicaments. (54)

The District Commissioner, in writing his proposed book, is representing some of the presuppositions about African texts that Achebe mentions—namely, the individual does

not matter, and so the story of one person who commits suicide is not worthy of a significant portion of a book. Following on Achebe's ideas on the individual and the novel will be my investigation of subjectivity, of the relation between the individual and the community, and of friendship and society. All of these, I want to suggest, are important concepts when reading Achebe's novel.

In his essay entitled "The Writer and His Community," Chinua Achebe in addressing the common opposition between the individual and community claims, "I am suggesting that what is at issue here is the principle which has come to be known as individualism and which has dominated the life and the psychology of the West in its modern history. The virtues of individualism are held to be universally beneficial...particularly so to the artist" (*Writer* 49). As African cultures have been marginalized by the West, his aim is to make readers of his fiction and nonfiction take seriously the texts and philosophies of African peoples. In writing *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe is trying to bring to the forefront the importance of subjectivity for the Igbo people. In order to display such subjectivity, Achebe represents the idea of the *chi*, which is, for all intents and purposes, the other self of the Igbo. In effect, he creates characters such as Okonkwo and Obierika, two men who have *chis* but who respond to them in different ways. While Okonkwo defies his, Obierika serves as the more exemplary subject and works with his *chi*.

Although Western critics have long thought of African people as being formed solely by the community, Achebe attempts to prove these critics wrong. Once again in "The Writer and his Community," Achebe states that "Western literature played a central role in promoting the ideal of individual autonomy... It promoted the view of society and of culture as a prisonhouse from which the individual must escape in order to find space

and fulfillment” (52-53). Achebe claims that the Igbo traditions present instead the *chi*, a unique and individuated model of subjectivity that is based upon a unique creator for each and every person. *Things Fall Apart* responds to this notion of society as imprisoning the individual by taking the example of Okonkwo, who follows what I would consider an absolutist path, one where there is no room for flexibility and ultimately leads to an excessively rigid model of subjectivity.¹ In contrast, the other main character in Achebe’s text, Obierika, serves as Achebe’s ideal critic and subject, due to the fact that he is accepting of difference and embraces inconsistency. What we find in the novel is an exploration, by means of characterization, that questions the social-individual dichotomy.

While these two men are on different ends of the spectrum, where Okonkwo believes in an overarching sense of how life is to be lived, as opposed to Obierika who values social and individual differences and who seems to value the notions of *chi* that Achebe represents in the text, it is these specific qualities and differences that manifest themselves in these two men and thus creates a friendship that is grounded in differences rather than in similarities as Aristotle’s theory of friendship would suggest. Their friendship, in fact, resonates very closely with the Derridean reading of Aristotle on friendship, a reading that makes the case for the notion that friends value each other’s uniqueness and solitude, which holds very closely to Achebe’s thoughts on *chi*. By looking at the *chi*, at Okonkwo as a subject, at Obierika as a subject, and lastly at their friendship of differences, my sense is that Achebe’s own thoughts and model of subjectivity are grounded in the acceptance of differences and the ability to follow one’s *chi*, despite the obstacles and difficult path that it might create for one along the way.

I. Achebe's Vision of the *Chi* and of Subjectivity

Chinua Achebe discusses the notion of the individual self in terms of *chi*. He defines *chi* "as [a person's] other identity in spiritland (*Chi* 159). Rather than being something within the self, it is instead a separate form. Achebe speaks of the importance of "duality" in Igbo culture, and he states, "Wherever Something stands, Something Else will stand beside it" (160), implying that there is never just the one and that the one is insufficient on its own. This other self is of equal importance as the being that lives in our world (160-161). He writes:

The idea of individualism is sometimes traced to the Christian principle that God created all men and that consequently every one of them is presumed worthy in His sight. The Igbo do better than that. They postulate the concept of every man as both a unique creation and the work of a unique creator. Which is as far as individualism and uniqueness can possibly go! (*Chi* 164)

One of the most fascinating aspect of *chi* that cannot be overlooked is that *chi* is the ultimate creator itself (164-165). In the Igbo language, the name for the god is Chi Ukwu, which means "Great Chi" (165). While Chi Ukwu is the "supreme" god, each person has his or her own separate self that allows a certain amount of self-creation (164-166)ⁱⁱ. Although the *chi* is under control by Chi Ukwu, it is nonetheless one of the driving forces behind individual subjectivity.

Chi is the existence that, while living in "spiritland," plays a role in determining a person's quality of life. Even if a person tries his or her best to change a given situation, the *chi* can be unmoving, and despite the person's best effort, it is the *chi* that has the

final say, although “power so complete, even in the hands of *chi*, is abhorrent to the Igbo imagination” (162-163). Power in general is more evenly distributed in the Igbo culture, and they pride themselves on being egalitarian. However, in the case of *chi*, the specific individual creator for each person has a modicum of control over the life that he or she is to live.

In *Things Fall Apart*, it is evident that the *chi* is concerned with the individual person’s success in life. For example, upon being exiled from his community and realizing that his life is becoming torn at the seams, Okonkwo thinks to himself:

He had been cast out of his clan like a fish on to a dry, sandy beach, panting. Clearly his personal god or *chi* was not made for great things. A man could not rise above the destiny of his *chi*. The saying of the elders was not true—that if a man said yes his *chi* also affirmed. Here was a man whose *chi* said nay despite his own affirmation. (*Things* 76)

As Achebe states in the *chi* essay, “The Igbo believe that a man receives his gifts or talents, his character—indeed his portion in life—before he comes into the world” (*Chi* 163). Despite it appearing as if the individual’s life has been predetermined, Achebe tells us that the person can bargain with his or her *chi* (163). Questioning traditional wisdom, Okonkwo thinks that one cannot exceed one’s *chi*. Evidently to him, Okonkwo’s acts in life—whether it be the beating of his wives, or the scorning of his children, or even his outlook on life—constitute a path that was too narrow. Even though Okonkwo wants to do certain things, because his *chi* was not made to do it, he is never able to reach his personal goals, as they were not apportioned to him. For it is, as the narrator says, that if a man does not have a good *chi* then “evil fortune followed him to the grave” (12).

Chinua Achebe cites the *chi* as the strongest support for his claim that the Igbo have a better sense of individualized subjectivity than does the West. It is the *chi*'s uniqueness and the subsequent belief that each person has his or her own fate that lead Achebe, and me, into the discussion of Africans having, in fact, represented individualized subjectivity in their literature. Every single person in the Igbo world has a different portion in life; that which Okonkwo and his friend Obierika have, for example, cannot be the same, for they have different *chis*. Achebe believes that the Western prejudice that Africans have no conception of a self is completely preposterous. The notion of conforming to one absolutist idea of how life is to be lived is negative, seeing that it is the absolutism that leads to the rigidity in society, while it is in fact individuality, as *Things Fall Apart* shows, that in fact leads to a resilient community. Rather than the Western belief that the society and individual can never coexist, Achebe's novel serves as the counterpoint: that it is the individuality of each person in a society that leads to its successful maintenance.

II. Okonkwo and Absolutism

Okonkwo serves as not only a protagonist and "tragic hero" in Achebe's text; he also is there to display what negativity lies behind one being an absolutist and in the process how one can become an outcast. In the process, he does not understand the individuated apportioning that the Igbo truly point towards, and because he does not entertain ambiguity and change, he forces himself into a life that he does not want to see altered. He creates an imprisonment that the Igbo culture does not strive towards. His inability to be flexible in his beliefs and his incorrect notion that there is a single path that one is to follow stem from his hatred of his father, Unoka. Perhaps it is his supreme

loathing of his father which forces him to choose an inflexible path. As the narrator states, Unoka was considered an “unsuccessful [man]” for the fact that he never took a “title” within the Igbo land (*Things* 6). He was considered too “idle” because he was more interested in playing the flute and drinking (4-5, 10).ⁱⁱⁱ Considered a near outcast because of his attitudes towards important matters such as war (he was against it because he was “a coward”), his father failed to leave his mark upon his passing (5-6). Okonkwo was ashamed of his father because of his lack of power in the community:

Even as a little boy [Okonkwo] had resented his father’s failure and weakness, and even now he still remembered how he had suffered when a playmate told him that his father was *agbala*. That was how Okonkwo first came to know that *agbala* was not only another name for a woman, it could also mean a man who had taken no title. (10)

Consequently, he made it his life-long goal to go against all of the things that his father supposedly stood for, including “gentleness and...idleness” (10).

In going against all of the things that his father held dearly, he begins on a path that he imagines can never be changed: one that finds him striving to be masculine and to be a leader in Umuofia. As the narrator states, “When Unoka died, he had taken no title at all and he was heavily in debt. Any wonder then that his son Okonkwo was ashamed in him? Fortunately, among these people a man was judged according to his worth and not according to the worth of his father” (6-7). In creating this destiny for himself, he fails to take a major part of Igbo tradition into account: his *chi*. He fails to listen to it, fails to negotiate with it, and in essence he refuses to live his life in any other way than he sees fit, and consequently he believes that everyone else should live their lives accordingly. Okonkwo clearly does not understand the concept of individuation that the *chi* represents.

There are several instances in the text itself that show Okonkwo’s inability to see life in any other way than the way that he sees best. One of the most crucial instances involves his relationship with his son Nwoye. Okonkwo has a strong dislike for his son

because there is “too much of his mother in him”; in other words, he is too feminine for his liking (40). In one of his conversations with Obierika, Okonkwo expresses his concerns for Nwoye. He tells Obierika,

If I had a son like him [Maduka, Obierika’s son] I should be happy. I am worried about Nwoye. A bowl of pounded yams can throw him in a wrestling match...But I can tell you, Oberika, that my children do not resemble me...I have done my best to make Nwoye grow into a man, but there is too much of his mother in him. (40)

Because Nwoye does not represent what Okonkwo believes every man should be like, he does not accept his son for who he is. Consequently he fails to respect the *chi* of others, including his own kin. The narrator states, “Okonkwo wanted his son to be a great farmer and a great man. He would stamp out the disquieting signs of laziness which he thought he already saw in him” (21). Even if the *chi* of his own son has him destined to be a man who was not a farmer in the mold of his father, it is still no excuse for him not to be like Okonkwo’s idealized subject. On the other side of the equation, however, Okonkwo displays much happiness in his daughter Ezinma. He cares deeply for his daughter because she embodies the characteristics of the ideal man more than Nwoye does. He repeatedly says, throughout the novel, ““She should have been a boy”” (39).

There comes a point in the book where Ezinma is taken by the priestess of the village and her life is in serious danger. Okonkwo senses this danger and follows her, despite the fact that one “[should not] speak when a god speaks...” (60). Preserving his daughter for Okonkwo is in a sense the preservation of his masculinity and his absolutist beliefs; similarly with his son, there is a concern about masculinity and absolutism. However, when it comes to his son, he is not as willing to save him. This is best exemplified when Nwoye converts to Christianity. Rather than trying to get him to return home or, in any way, trying to salvage their relationship, Okonkwo instead thinks, “that Nwoye was not worth fighting for...To abandon the gods of one’s father and go about

with a lot of effeminate men clucking like old hens was the very depth of abomination” (88). Because Nwoye is different from him and he rejects the beliefs of his ancestors, Okonkwo does not feel that his son deserves to be rescued.

Okonkwo has a very clear sense of how one is supposed to live. The idea of a different apportioning of abilities to each person seems foreign. In consequence, Okonkwo believes in an unwarranted sense of absolutism because he thinks things should be a certain way and that everyone must arrange his or her life according to his way. Okonkwo believes everyone must conform to his ideas of a man that were formed and based on his fear of becoming like his father.

In the same way that he forces those closest to him into a specific mold, Okonkwo forces his life into a form of masculinity that allows for no exceptions. In the process, Okonkwo fails to ever truly know his *chi*. Because he is so adamant in not being like Unoka, he does whatever it takes to do so, even if it means defying his own *chi*. This at first works out well for him, as he is successful in his community and appears poised for great things. However, upon becoming exiled from his community for accidentally killing a clansman, his life turns for the worse. Because “Okonkwo’s gun had exploded and a piece of iron had pierced the boy’s heart” (74), he is forced to leave Umuofia. In terms of *chi*, he does not deal realistically with what is involved in attaining success. Achebe’s notion of *chi* would have it that he needs life changes. Okonkwo does not do this, however. He remains stubborn and will not change his ways, which would entail his being accepting of the differences of others and accepting their *chis*, as well as his own. It is not the community that is rigid; it instead is his interpretation of how a man is supposed to live that leads to his own imprisonment. While the community strives for each person to work with his or her own *chi*, Okonkwo does not understand this, and he subsequently creates a world where he is stuck conforming to beliefs that do not actually exist for most of the Igbo people represented in the novel.

One of the best examples of a person who understands his *chi* in less absolutist terms and who respects the uniqueness of others is Uchendu, Okonko's uncle. Uchendu believes that people have the right to be different, even if it seems somewhat dangerous. He demonstrates such tolerance of difference when the white colonizers come to a neighboring village, Abame, and wipe it out because one of their comrades was killed. Even though these people are different and do not have the same culture as the Igbo, he believes that one should "[n]ever kill a man who says nothing" (81). He goes on to say, "Those men of Abame were fools. What did they know about the man? ...The world as no end, and what is good among one people is an abomination with others" (81-82). Even though these foreign men were different, they had the right to be so. Each person can be unique or as different as they are. Okonkwo, however, does not think in such a manner. He responds, "They were fools... They had been warned that danger was ahead. They should have armed themselves with their guns and their matchets even when they went to market" (81). Everyone should be like him and maintain a militant existence.

Not only does Okonkwo refuse differences, but he also does not believe in the idea of negotiating with one's *chi*. He blames his misfortune not on his shortcomings, but on the *chi* itself. In a moment of free indirect discourse the narrator tells us, "He saw clearly in it [his misfortune] the finger of his personal god or *chi*. For how else could he explain his great misfortune and exile...?" (88) As opposed to believing that perhaps there is something wrong with the way that he is living his life and that there is something that he could do to mend his life, Okonkwo instead wallows in his sorrow and holds fast to his beliefs in a masculine absolutism.

Okonkwo thinks to himself, "His life had been ruled by a great passion—to become one of the lords of the clan. That had been his life-spring. He had been cast out of his clan like a fish...Clearly his personal god or *chi* was not made for great things...Here was a man whose *chi* said nay despite his own affirmation (76). It is

apparent at this point in the text that Okonkwo is in complete discord with his people's beliefs. As was said in Achebe's "*Chi* in Igbo Cosmology," the *chi* set[s] limit to man's aspirations (*Writer* 161). While at the beginning of the text all is good with Okonkwo (in his eyes, at least), by this point in the text he has reached a low point. The point gets even lower when his people fail to rally around him, and he consequently commits suicide (*Things* 115-117). As Okonkwo sees it, his *chi* is not properly aligned with his desire, and because of this, he finds himself conflicted and extremely unbalanced. He is unwilling to adjust his beliefs and negotiate with difference, and consequently his *chi* and his desires are irreconcilable. In this way, Okonkwo is unable to become an ideal Igbo subject and gain his own sense of self in the traditional Igbo sense. For reasons such as these, the *chi* gives us a philosophy according to which one is resilient. As we will later see with Obierika, one who does not challenge his *chi* is rather flexible; one goes with the course of life.

For now I want to say that in the Igbo tradition, one attempts to work with the *chi*, which in itself promotes difference. Unlike the statement by Achebe at the beginning of this thesis, where Christians strive for unity under one God, the Igbo are all governed by separate ones, showing that they value what is good through unity or difference (*Chi* 164). This Western model is far more similar to Okonkwo's view than is the traditional Igbo idea of *chi*. He believes that what he sees fitting is to be followed by everyone (including himself) under every circumstance.

However, his culture says otherwise, and he neglects the *chis* of his people as well as his own by failing to attempt to negotiate with it when times are difficult. In this way, Okonkwo cannot be a normative Igbo subject, and consequently he is an outsider in

Achebe's text because he is unwilling to accept difference in the way that Obierika and the culture as a whole do. As I have mentioned, inconsistency and difference have no place in Okonkwo's world, and his efforts to will his own success prove futile since there is really no absolute ideology to follow; he has created it himself through fear. The Igbo society is not one that desires to hide individual uniqueness; it is quite the contrary as the *chi* examples. It is Okonkwo's rather Western desire to conform to what he thinks his society wants that restrains him. The community and the individual are meant to work together, hand in hand in support of one another. As Achebe says, "Sometimes [the artist's] friends...hear him working in the bush, so they come and sit with him and watch him carve. They give him advice telling him how to carve, even if they themselves do not know how. He is not offended by their suggestions" (58). The community supports the individual finding his or her uniqueness. Okonkwo does not comprehend this and is, consequently, an outsider in his own world. Achebe proves that the society does not imprison the individual; it is the individual who believes in absolutes who imprisons uniqueness. In order to further examine the model that Achebe argues in favor of, then, one of negotiations for success and with difference, we must examine Obierika, Okonkwo's countermodel in Achebe's novel.

II. Obierika: the Social Critic and Exemplary^{iv} Subject

To further grasp how the community and individual are in unison with one another, one must look closer at one of the text's central characters, Obierika. Obierika serves a dual purpose in Achebe's text. He is simultaneously an exemplary subject and critical of his culture at the same time. In order to be an exemplary subject, Obierika must

show those traits of working with the *chi* and the traditions of the Igbo people that Achebe speaks of. To this end, Obierika accomplishes this very well. He knows how to live by the moral standards that his people hold dearly: he does not break laws of peace, does not defy the orders of gods, and, most importantly of all, he respects women and remembers his *chi* and negotiates with it. In fact, he looks to be the embodiment of Igbo codes of conduct. Everyone in Umuofia would be well served modeling their lives in such a manner.

He understands the importance of women in the world, and although he knows that men are the dominant figures, he understands that the culture respects women, a concept that Okonkwo cannot grasp due to the fear of being “feminine” like his father. When speaking of one of the fallen clansmen, he states that “[it] was always said that Ndule and Ozoemena had one mind’... ‘I remember when I was a young boy there was a song about them. He could not do anything without telling her.’” Okonkwo believes that because this man listened to his wife, he was inherently weak. However, Obierika retorts by saying, “He led Umuofia to war in those days” (42). Here it is clear that Obierika embodies a very important concept in his Igbo world: that women have a definitive position that is not to be frowned upon or lessened. This idea of that women have a place in the Igbo world is a notion seemingly based upon dualism, a common theme in Igbo traditions, for it is said “where one thing stands, another stands beside it.” Women must be important to the society, then, as a dualistic counter must complement the men. An exemplary character, Uchendu, Okonkwo’s uncle, sums up this belief best:

It’s true a child belongs to its father. But when a father beats his child, it seeks sympathy in its mother’s hut. A man belongs to his fatherland when

things are good and life is sweet. But when there is sorrow and bitterness, he finds refuge in his motherland. Your mother is there to protect you. She is buried there. And that is why we say that mother is supreme. (78)

One of the key things that one must do in order to be considered exemplary in the Igbo world is to respect women and to acknowledge that there are certain amounts of femininity in men. However, men are not to be too feminine, as evidenced by Obierika's stating to Okonkwo that "I am not afraid of blood; and if anyone tells you that I am, he is telling a lie." (41) Although saying this, he understands that does not mean women are to be abused and thought of in a poor light, as the dualistic nature of the traditions makes a female counterpart assume great importance, and respect towards them is therefore a necessity. Such cultural values are things that Obierika understands, and because of this, he is the exemplary Igbo man: he fully grasps how the way his world means to live, and he incorporates its values in his everyday life.

The other key thing that Obierika does to be an exemplary Igbo subject is that he negotiates with his *chi* in a way that is expected of the Igbo people. When things do not go well for him, he shows resiliency. He has proven resilient in the face of the death of his twin daughters because he knows that it is, unfortunately, in the best interests of his people; in essence, then, resiliency is necessary (74). He thinks to himself that, "The Earth had decreed that they were an offence on the land and must be destroyed. And if the clan did not exact punishment for an offence against the great goddess, her wrath was loosed on all the land...As the elders said, if one finger brought oil it soiled the others" (74). He also does not fret when the colonizers arrive to change the village (99-100), and follows the tribe's rules of burial, even though the dead is his closest friend (116-117).

He exemplifies the lizard of Igbo lore: “if it lost its tail it soon grew another” (97). His resiliency allows him to be successful in life. The Igbo man is to work with his *chi*, and one experiences either success or failure depending on how one works with his other self. Because Obierika appears prosperous and successful throughout the entire text (as opposed to Okonkwo who suffers a tragic turn of events), he has either respected his *chi* from its onset or has done the necessary things in order to reconcile and negotiate with it. For such reasons, Obierika is Achebe’s exemplary Igbo subject: he follows the cultural values and negotiates with and honors his *chi*.

While Obierika respects his *chi* and is exemplary, it does not necessarily mean that he agrees with every aspect of the culture and its practices. In “For Chinua Achebe: The Resilience and the Predicament of Obierika,” Biodun Jeyifo writes about Obierika, and the relationship that he has with his community as a whole. Jeyifo asks Achebe in a face-to-face interview whether Obierika was meant to represent the author himself.

Achebe responds by saying:

The answer is yes, in the sense that at the crucial moment when things are happening, he represents this other alternative. . . The culture says you must be strong, you must be this and that, but when the moment comes for absolute strength the culture says no, hold it!... Obierika is therefore more subtle and more in tune with the danger, the impending betrayal by the culture. (Jeyifo 500)

Achebe’s claim is evidenced by Obierika’s thought processes. The example that comes to mind for me is when Obierika speaks to Okonkwo about Ikemefuna. Okonkwo asks why Obierika did not take part in the murder of Ikemefuna. In the dialogue that ensues,

Obierika tells Okonkwo, “What you have done will not please the Earth. It is the kind of action for which the goddess wipes out whole families” (*Things* 41). Okonkwo responds by saying that he had to do it because he was called upon to do so (41). Obierika’s final statement on this is: “That is true...But if the oracle said that my son should be killed I would neither dispute it nor be the one to do it” (41). Here Obierika can see that bad things can happen from following the culture in absolutist ways. If one does things that the culture asks, they can “betray” (Jeyifo 500) him and the entire village. Although the culture asks for such cruel acts, it does not mean that they are right. Obierika, then, serves quite an interesting purpose in the novel: he is a social critic. Jeyifo writes that Obierika is a “humane” and “sensitive” man, one who is able to discern what is going on in the society and is able to decide what must be done at any particular moment (500-501). At the high point of the essay, Jeyifo makes the statement that Obierika is a man “divided,” one who represents, “cultural affirmation and on the other hand cultural critique and deflation” (502-504). Consequently, Jeyifo considers Obierika to be a “[a] medium through which identity is negotiated between the self and others” (501).

Expanding on this idea of “cultural affirmation” and simultaneous critique, Jeyifo explains, “*Things Fall Apart* may be regarded in this respect as a vast doxological compendium of Igbo culture before the advent of colonialism” (504). In other words, the text is a way of presenting the ways of life for the Igbo. However, the text serves another purpose: it serves to critique the culture that it already has in place, before the colonists arrived. Jeyifo states, “For one pole is freighted with the discourse of the postcoloniality of nationalist assertion against colonial and imperial subjugation...the other pole is infused with the discourse of the critique of nationalism...” (504). In other words, this

text is not only a look into the ways of life that the Igbo lived before the colonists arrived; it also shows that the life before had its problems as well. In such a way, Obierika serves to prove such a point: he enjoys the life he has, but he is critical of the way things occur in his village nonetheless.

For Jeyifo, Obierika is a critic of the world around him. As was stated, he is able to distinguish between what the community holds in high regard but is also able to come to grips with the idea that changes/critiques might be necessary for the good of the people. This is best shown in some of his interactions with Okonkwo, who is not as flexible and is unable to deal constructively with significant changes. As opposed to Okonkwo who has a very inflexible idea of how his people are to live, Obierika respects the *chi* of each person and follows cultural norms, but he simultaneously questions the things he finds inconsistent.

In one instance that was briefly mentioned before, Obierika shows personal judgment towards the end of the text when Okonkwo has committed suicide. He knows quite well that the Igbo tradition does not have a place for those who have killed themselves (117). Obierika is aware that touching the corpse of one who has taken his life is “an offence against the earth” (117). At this point, it seems as if his traditional roots are completely in control of his reaction. Obierika, however, takes a sharp turn from tradition and makes a statement that comes from his own heart. He exclaims, “That man was one of the greatest men in Umuofia. You drove him to kill himself; and now he will be buried like a dog . . .” (117). From a statement such as this, it is clear that although Obierika does not agree with the way in which Okonkwo handles himself, he

nonetheless finds it a travesty that a man of his social position should be disrespectfully buried because of his tribe's laws.

It is here where Obierika proves to be a critic of his people. As Jeyifo points out, Obierika, although willing to follow the traditional paths, wants to do whatever it takes for his society to survive, and if this entails that one go along a path that is less than desirable, it must be done (502-504). Obierika is able to respect the culture that he was brought up in, but he is simultaneously able to judge whether it is right or wrong. It is these decisions that allow him to be "resilient." This resiliency stems from the fact that Obierika, like some of the people in the tribe, do not actually see a problem with everything that is going on around them, such as the incursion of colonial officials and missionaries (*Things* 98-99). The narrator states, "But apart from the church, the white men had also brought a government... The white man had indeed brought a lunatic religion, but he has also built a trading store and for the first time palm-oil and kernel became things of great price, and much money flowed into Umuofia" (99-101). In fact, rather than seeing all of the change as a negative, Obierika sees this as an opportunity: a chance to gain a new subjectivity, one that allows him to follow his personal beliefs and those of his people, so that he would not actually be defying anything (Jeyifo 502).

As was said earlier, he finds many problems in his current tradition. He goes so far as to ask himself when Okonkwo accidentally kills a man and his house is being torn down, "Why should a man suffer so grievously for an offence he had committed inadvertently?" (Jeyifo 503, *Things* 74). It is during instances such as these that the new way of life might not seem so terrible after all (502-504). Jeyifo says that Obierika "[has] worldly and human-centered skepticism..." (508). Obierika appears to be the perfect

social critic according Jeyifo: he supports his people, but he still sees problems and subsequently sees what must be done for his people to survive, an attribute that Okonkwo clearly lacks (500-504). However, Obierika is not only a social critic; he also exemplifies how one is to live if one is to honor one's *chi*. He shows resilience (as Jeyifo puts it) and weathers the course of things. The reason for such is because as an Igbo subject, such resiliency is necessary in order for the people of Umuofia to survive, despite whether one agrees with what the natural path is. Okonkwo, on the other hand, clearly cannot do this, as he fights to the death so as to not deviate from the way he wants things to be, rather than the way things are beginning to become.

Obierika, then, serves as two different subjects in the text: he is the exemplary Igbo man, and he is also Achebe's model of the social critic, which are two very different things. In the context of the novel, he follows the tradition and his own *chi* respecting the fact that everyone has a destiny that is different than his own. This is what the Igbo desire; they desire a person who follows respects his or her *chi* and respects the uniqueness of others, whether male or female. Achebe adds something else to his own personal view of subjectivity, however; this person must be able to question the cultural norms and be able to see the inconsistencies and problems with the culture. Consequently, Achebe's ideal subject is one who is able to question, one who knows that the culture is not perfect and is in need of change. For such reasons, I believe that Obierika is the ideal subject for two different trains of thought: the Igbo's and Achebe's own.

VII. Aristotle and Derrida

Achebe's reading of Christianity is one that, according to him, sees it as tending towards deemphasizing differences between persons. Having one creator, one single entity that produces all, emphasizes similarity, he argues, much more than does the Igbo notion of *chi* as a unique creator for each person. This creates the "prisonhouse," the structure that forces individuals to shy away from uniqueness and strive towards a unified sense of self. In *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe dramatizes at least a few characters who embrace their own difference, and at least one friendship that appears to be based on difference. This may, in turn, be read as dramatizing philosophical difference with Western tradition. Aristotle, on friendship, for example, suggests that a friendship is based upon the similarities within the people, and that only in sameness can a bond be fully tied. Interestingly, the contrasting notion of friendship that Achebe dramatizes resonates with Jacques Derrida's rereading of Aristotle, one which tends towards the notion that friendship is based on difference and the respect for difference, not sameness. However, one must start with the traditional reading of Aristotle in order to fully grasp his thoughts on friendship.

Aristotle's discussion of friendship begins with Aristotle saying that the perfect friendship is based upon resemblance in virtue. The reason for its being perfect is because it is a friendship not founded on superficiality; instead, it is based on a true respect for the other person (219-220). The reason that these friends like each other is because they see the same virtues in one another, and thus want to form bonds because they find similarities in their virtues (219-220). These sorts of friendships last for a long period of time, because "friendship lasts as long as [the friends] are good" (220), and because this

sense of good is based on inherent virtues, it is assumed that these traits never leave. These sorts of friendships are highly uncommon, and the reason for this is because they take a very long time to form, as they require a deep knowledge of the other person and the virtues that he or she has (220). Aristotle even goes so far to say, "One cannot extend friendship to or be a friend of another person until each partner has impressed the other that he is worthy of affection" (220). Friendships are few and far between because they require a deep knowledge of what the other person stands for, and this of course takes a great deal of time.

After his discussion of a perfect friendship, Aristotle speaks of such friendships as involving a notion that he describes as "self love" in Book IX. The reason that one is drawn to others is because one sees his or her own virtues in the other party (252-253). A friend is sort of like a reflection, "another self," an essential extension of the individual (253). One who is able to take care of himself and do what is best for himself sees such qualities in the other person; they share this virtue. Thus, sharing of virtues is loving of the self, as it is seeing the same virtues that one possesses in the other person that creates these bonds of perfect friendship (252-253).

Aristotle then uses the idea of a perfect friendship as the basis for the relationships found in a commonwealth. Aristotle does not call this friendship, however: he calls it "concord" (256). The distinguishing factor between a perfect friendship and concord is that one need not know everyone within the commonwealth to reach concord. Rather than being a sharing of virtues, which requires a deep knowledge of the other individual, it instead requires a sharing of opinions on topics concerning the commonwealth (256). For instance, "there is concord in a state when all citizens decide that the offices should be

elective, or that an alliance should be concluded with the Spartans” (256). A commonwealth necessitates having citizens in concord with one another, as these opinions on matters lead to the creation of goals for the state (257). With a common goal that has been reached due to concord, the state can achieve “what is important for life” (257). Concord, then, is similar to friendship because it is “friendship among fellow citizens” (257).

Having explained the commonwealth as being related to the perfect friendship, Aristotle describes the less perfect forms of friendship: the ones that are not based on a similarity in virtue. He outlines in detail one such friendship that is what he terms “unequal.” It is unequal because one party has much power over the other, as is the case with a ruler and his people (227). Aristotle explains that, because these individuals are in such different positions within society, “the virtue or excellence and the function of each partner is different, and the cause of their affection, too, is different...It is clear that the partners do not receive the same thing from one another and should not seek to receive it” (227). Friendship between those who are unequal cannot be built on similarity in virtue or in what one wishes to get from the other, as those in different positions will naturally have different sets of values (227). Nevertheless, Aristotle still maintains that equality is a necessity for any sort of friendship to be true (227). In order to find equality in unequal relationships, he states that these individuals must be equalized by proportional amounts of love and benefits (227-228). In other words, one must always try to give more than one receives, for they might not be giving equal amounts, but the “merit” behind the giving is what is key; it is the “thought that counts.” Aristotle claims, “For when the affection is proportionate to the merit of each partner, there is in some sense equality between them”

(227). While the individuals might not be on equal footing, if they give as much as they can, then there is a sense of equality that is created amongst them (227-228).

The other imperfect form of friendship Aristotle outlines is that of one that is based on pleasure or utility. While a perfect friendship is one based on a sharing of virtues and good, a lesser friendship is one that may be based upon one's ability to be useful (221). These types of friendship cannot possibly last as long as one that involves a similarity in virtue, as when one party ceases being useful to the other, there is no longer reason for the relationship to continue (221). Aristotle does concede that such friendships can last if there are similarities amongst the people; however, because it entails "what is profitable," there is no true grounding in the relationship that can be maintained (221). This idea is summed up best by Aristotle's idea that, "[t]hose whose friendship is based on the useful dissolve as soon as it ceases to be to their advantage, since they were friends not of each other but of what was profitable for them" (221).

In examining Aristotle in his traditional readings, it is clear that the key theme in relationships is similarity between those who are in relationship with one another. Aristotle cites that the only way a perfect friendship can be possible is through sharing the same virtues, for it is in this way that one can "love the other's character" (221). One who is able to love oneself can be friends with another person because one sees one's self in the other person, and a sharing of virtues becomes evident. A similar sense of friendship is evident in a commonwealth because it is a society of people with similar ideas and who strive for the same goal. This concord and agreement is similar to that sharing of virtue and good found in the perfect friendship, as it is the commonality of either goals or in values that creates and bonds such relationships.

One author who has called traditional readings of Aristotle into question is Jacques Derrida. In *The Politics of Friendship*, Derrida constantly teases readers with the question of “how many,” asking traditional readers of Aristotle how many friends one can actually have. Derrida cannot accept the idea that friendships are based on similarities because of the fact that a commonwealth is based on perfect friendships. While traditionalists aim for concord in their communities, Derrida does not think that concord can be the basis of commonwealths for a simple reason: no one can come to agreement with or be friends with that large amount of people. Thus, the idea that a government and decision-making can be built on common interests or shared virtues cannot be. Derrida then looks at one traditional reader of Aristotle, Cicero, and examines his train of thought and his quest for finding similarity in Aristotle’s relationships.

Cicero believes that the friend is one who is exactly like the person in question. He is of the mind that one’s friend is essentially a perfect replica of the original person (Derrida 4). This idea of the friend being exactly like the original person is what forms Cicero’s thoughts on friendship: he defines it as “our own image” (4). Cicero reads Aristotle very traditionally: Men desire what is good, and what is good is friendship. Therefore, friendship is dependent on the individuals’ desire to find similarities in his fellow man, and a commonwealth is based on a similar sense of concord. Thus, friendship traditionally involves similarities.

Derrida, however, finds great contradiction in this reading of Aristotle, and he points out several instances in which Aristotle speaks not of sameness, but rather of difference as being that which brings friends together. He finds proof of this in Aristotle’s own writings: that two people in a relationship are going to be inherently different, as one

who loves is a far different position from the one who is loved. In the original text, Aristotle writes, "For lover and beloved do not find pleasure in the same objects: the lover finds it in seeing his beloved, while the beloved receives it from the attention paid to him by his lover" (Aristotle 221). Derrida uses this as an opportunity to point out the fact that there is an inherent difference among those who are friends.

Because, "[t]he friend is the person who loves before being the person who is "loved," such friends are striving for different goals. As opposed to good that traditionalists look for in Aristotle, which is commonality in goals, Derrida points out that Aristotle himself states that there must be difference for friendship to occur, as there is not a common goal; instead, these friends are quite different.

Unlike the traditional reading of Aristotle, where the commonalities are emphasized, Derrida pursues and suggests that friends are those who are different from one another, as each friendship is one that must be singularly proven over time. Aristotle himself says, "One cannot extend friendship to or be a friend of another person until they have eaten the specified [measure] of salt together" (Aristotle 220). By this, Aristotle means to say that a friendship takes time to develop because these friends must have gone through experiences with one another (220-221). Derrida, however, states that it is this exact idea of a time commitment that prevents friends from seeking similarities in one another, for if it were the similarities being desired, friends would be easy to find and would take no time at all. He proposes, in fact, that friends are these who protect one another's solitude and singularity, both characteristics that are defined by difference (Derrida 35). One cannot have too many friends, then, as there is not enough time in one's life to develop that many friendships. It takes time to develop these bonds because

one must examine the differences in the other party and see if he or she is worth bonding over. Aristotle is hinting that sameness cannot be the basis of friendship, then, as sameness would lead to us being friends with everyone around us.

Derrida finds more indications that friendship is not based on similarity in Aristotle's discussion of the time frame for friendships. Aristotle writes:

To be friends with many people, in the sense of perfect friendship, is impossible, just as it is impossible to be in love with many people at the same time. For love is like an extreme, an extreme that tends to be unique...Also, one must have some experience of the other person and have come to be familiar with him, and that is the hardest thing of all (225).

Derrida claims that this is key to respecting difference amongst people, as these relationships take a long time to form, and thus one cannot be friends with too many people at a time (Derrida 21). If one sought out similarity, then friends would be relatively easy to find because the process of getting to know the other person would be easy. This is impossible, though, because each person must take time to know the other, and this is because each person is in fact different; Aristotle himself says this (Aristotle 220). This, then, suggests that because each friendship is between people who are different, each friendship is unique in its own right and singular. For Derrida, "We are first of all, as friends, the friends of solitude, and we are calling on you to share what cannot be shared: solitude. We are friends of an entirely different kind, inaccessible friends, friends who are alone because they are incomparable and without common measure" (35). Friends are not those who desire the same things, then: they are those who desire the differences in one another, who respect the "solitudes" of each other, the

uniqueness of their partner. Derrida, therefore, sees tensions in Aristotle's writing about friendship, tensions which contradict traditional reading. From these tensions, and using other Western philosophers as well, Derrida discusses friends as valuing uniqueness, as every friendship, due to the fact that it takes time to develop, must be different and involve differences between the people. Otherwise, it would be possible for one to be friends with everyone, which Aristotle himself says is not possible.

Even within a friendship, sameness cannot be achieved because each party is receiving something different, a different sort of goal. For example, if one friend gives the other money, they receive different things: one gets the money, and the other gets honor. However, these are not equal gifts, as the honor is greater than the money. Consequently, even in a perfect friendship, these friends are differentiated from one another because they are not looking for the same result nor do they achieve the same things. Thus, friendships entail finding uniqueness in one another, as every person in every relationship is destined to achieve something different within the specific relationship.

Going even further, Derrida states that friends are differentiated from one another because when one gives, the other gets, which creates an inherent difference. In a similar vein, similarities among friends and a community as a whole prove impossible because each man is not only different from his friend, but is different from himself as well. Derrida says, although one may be considered a certain trait, that one is also not that trait. For instance, one can be a male. In being a male, one might reject certain aspects of being male and consequently not be completely male. One could then say that, "I am a male, but I am also not a male." In doing so, each person is different from himself. In the text

entitled *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida*, author John D. Caputo discusses a conversation that he had with Derrida. In this conversation, Derrida stated, "I am European...[b]ut I am not, nor do I feel, European in *every part*, that is, European through and through." (Caputo 214-215) Caputo responds by saying that, "Derrida does not renounce the idea of cultural identity...but he wants such identity to be internally differentiated, so that one is *not* identical with oneself, so marked by a 'difference with itself' that the very idea of 'we' is destabilized" (214-215). Derrida means to say that one cannot fully be a specific category but is always in some sense different from any category, and hence different from the self who identifies with the category.

In the process, an important point becomes apparent: if one is different from one's self, it is difficult to categorize friends as "similar" when each is internally differentiated. People cannot be categorized, there can be no "we" or "they" because each individual is not only self-differentiated, but is consequently different from his fellow man. Therefore, the commonwealth cannot be based upon similarities as traditional Aristotelian readers posit; it must instead be based upon difference because each man has different goals, receives different things in friendships, and is different from himself. A relationship takes time to develop because one must know the differences of the other party deeply; friends are different from one another for such reasons, and they strive to know the other's unique solitudes, and such is the essence of friendship for Derrida: difference and the respect of it are necessities, as a relationship based upon sameness would not be friendship at all because if this were true, one would have many friends that would be made very quickly, as like would recognize like. This is impossible, though, as

Aristotle himself says that relationships take time to develop. Consequently, because concord in a community is built on the perfect friendship, the commonwealth's structure must be based on difference in the same way that a friendship is. At the end, Derrida hopes that the West can learn to read itself as a culture that respects difference, and he is hopeful that the philosophers of the future can learn to find uniqueness as the key threads in relationships.

VIII. Friendship in Achebe

Achebe writes of a friendship in his text that is clearly not Aristotelian in the sense of the traditional readings; Okonkwo and Obierika are in fact incredibly different from one another. While the casual reader may say that they only differ in a few key aspects of their lives, there are several key things that distinguish their modes of living from one another. First of all, the men have two very different motivations for living their lives the ways that they do. As has been stated previously, Okonkwo's reason for living his life is for the purpose of self-creation and such a motivation stems from fear. Early on in the text, we find that his fear stems from his father. Our narrator says:

But his whole life was dominated by fear, the fear of failure and weakness. It was deeper and more intimate than the fear of evil and capricious gods and of magic...Okonkwo's fear was fear was greater than these. It was not external but lay deep within himself. It was the fear of himself, lest he should be found to resemble his father. Even as a little boy he had resented his father's failure and weakness...And so Okonkwo was ruled by one

passion—to hate everything that his father Unoka had loved. One of these things was gentleness and another was idleness (Things 10)

From lines such as these, we learn that Okonkwo's motivation for life is not the typical Igbo notion of following *chi*; instead, it is to create a destiny that is his own based on his dismay for Unoka. Appropriately, Okonkwo then proceeds to live his life in the least feminine way possible; he becomes an accomplished wrestler (18), grows yams because they are "manly" (21), threatens one of his wives because she says he is not good with a gun (24-25), and even goes so far as to kill his foster son for his fear of "being thought weak" (38). A desire to be the epitome of masculinity motivates his life.

Conversely, Obierika does not appear to be a man driven by fears and hatred. Obierika seems much more content to let his life play out; rather than being a self-creationist, he is more traditional in terms of honoring *chi*. If things are not the way he believes they should be, he is content to let them work themselves out. While Okonkwo shows a great fear for his son's being too feminine, Obierika believes that the children should not be pushed into masculinity. He states, "You worry yourself for nothing...The children are still very young" (40). In contrast to Okonkwo's worry about being masculine and his children's masculinity, Obierika is not concerned with such trivial matters. He instead is focused much more on the wellbeing of the community and showing it in his critique of his village's hypocrisy. He shows this in his being critical of the codes of conduct, as Jeyifo has pointed out previously. For example, when Okonkwo states that there is a "law of the land [that] must be obeyed," Obierika says, "I don't know how we got that law...In many other clans a man of title is not forbidden to climb the palm tree but he can tap the short ones standing on the ground" (42). Obierika believes

his society has many inconsistencies in it, and accordingly serves to point such things out to people of his village and the readers of the text. For such a reason, he is far less concerned with looking masculine or feminine; his life consists of following the rules but of being critical of them for the good of the community; thus, his main purpose is the preservation of *chi* and preserving the resiliency of Umuofia, as opposed to Okonkwo whose purpose is to be as masculine as possible, despite the fact that it might hurt himself and/or the community as a whole.

Other key differences that these men share is that a) one becomes exiled from his community, while the other does not, b) one suffers much hardship, reaches success, and then loses it, while we do not see any failure from the other, and c) one has respect for women, while one clearly shows disdain for them. However, all of these differences stem from the initial difference I pointed out: Okonkwo is driven by fear while Obierika is driven by a desire to respect *chi* and to see his village succeed in the long run. Such differences create a major divide between the characters, and thus they make it very clear that these men are different from one another. Thus, they cannot have a bond that is based on similarities. It is clear that if these men are to be considered friends, it would most certainly be through the lens of Derrida's reading of Aristotle. The question then arises, however: are Okonkwo and Obierika really friends?

My answer to this is a definitive "yes," but only for one side. For Obierika is accepting of the differences of Okonkwo, but Okonkwo does not believe in the same acceptances. However, Obierika is still a friend to Okonkwo through these differences, and this friendship manifests itself in several ways. When Okonkwo is sent into exile, it is Obierika who takes care of his property (*Things* 74). When Okonkwo's body is found,

it is Obierika who stands up for him, despite the fact that he does not agree with the suicide or the way in which Okonkwo conducted himself in life (117). Okonkwo, then, would be the loved. He is the one receiving the affection, the one whose differences and values are being respected no matter how outlandish they may be. He is unwavering in his beliefs, and he refuses to see any other sides to a problem. Obierika understands the concept that giving and receiving are different, and thus he knows that there will always be differentiations in relationships. As opposed to the Cicerian reading, which would say Okonkwo and Obierika would strive to find the same virtues, Derridean reading makes much more sense. The lens of Derrida would suggest that they are friends (or that Obierika is a friend, at least) because it is a friendship based on the respecting of one another's uniqueness and solitudes. In the same way, the community of Umuofia is founded on the same system of values.

As was stated previously in the thesis, Achebe envisions the community as supporting the individual artist that follows his or her own path. This, strangely enough, is not necessarily how Umuofia as a whole is constructed. While Obierika is critical of the way his world works and can accept differences, not everyone in the society can. Characters such as Chielo, the one who takes Ezinma to her potential death, are strict adherents to the codes of conduct and are not as flexible in their views of the village's virtues. For every flexible character like Uchendu, who states, "We have albinos among us. Do you think that they came to our clan by mistake, that they have strayed from their home to a land where everybody is like them?" (82), there is a restrained character like Okonkwo. Umuofia, while it might in fact be a village that is grounded in valuing the differences and uniqueness of everyone, is not exactly a village that is accepting of

difference as a whole. While the Igbo might believe in difference in their cultural doctrine, it does not mean that everyone in the village follows it. Subsequently, Obierika serves as the exemplary subject for the Igbo people in the village, as he represents what his people are supposed to be but are not necessarily like. Achebe is being critical of his people as a whole, and Obierika is the character who shows how Achebe envisions his ideal man. His acceptance of differences allows him to not only be friends with Okonkwo, but to be a fully immersed member of his community, as his acceptance of values allows him to fully integrate himself.

In becoming an exemplary subject, he proves to be a great friend of Okonkwo. He is able to be with him through the good times and the bad, as was pointed out previously. Because he is able to still see such differences in himself and in Okonkwo, but is able to still support him no matter what, Obierika proves to be a friend to Okonkwo. While Okonkwo is not a friend, in the Derridean reading of Aristotle, to his counterpart, as he does not respect differences in the way Obierika does, and consequently does not really support him, Obierika nonetheless stays a friend to him and follows the Derridean lines of friendship, even though the dedication is not reciprocated. In looking at Derrida, it becomes interesting to note that his vision of uniqueness and the respect for solidarity is very similar to Achebe's idea of each person having a unique chi. It is the differences in each person that are valued; not the sameness. Although traditional Western doxa, according to Achebe, constrain the individual and his uniqueness, it seems to be just the opposite. The man who respects difference is the one who becomes integrated into his community, whereas the man who is absolutist and inflexible never links with the member of his world in friendship or community.

IX. Conclusion

I now return to the epigraph at the beginning of this thesis, the statement involving the English District Commissioner. In claiming that Okonkwo did not merit a full chronicle of his life, the Commissioner is adopting the typical Western thought that there is a lack of uniqueness in Igbo individuality. Achebe writes his famous novel as a response to critics like the commissioner and to the West as a whole. *Things Fall Apart* serves to show just how individualized the Igbo culture attempts to be, and it shows the consequence of how one who attempts to avoid the individuality of one's self and others suffers dire consequences.

Achebe's vision of the Igbo in terms of individuality is rather simple: he posits that because of the *chi* and the desire to adhere to its principles, the Igbo have a great respect for uniqueness. The West, while usually imagined as being in favor of individuality, according to Achebe does not posit as unique a sense of the self as it claims, as it has one creator overall, while each Igbo person has his or her own creator. However, when looking at Derrida and his reading of respect for differences in Aristotle, the West and the Igbo do not seem so far apart.

At the end of this investigation, three main conclusions can be reached. First and foremost, Achebe has proven to us through *Things Fall Apart* that the African Igbo have, in fact, a very individualized notion of subjectivity. It is in their unwritten doctrine that the uniqueness of each person be respected due to the fact that the *chi* of each individual person is completely different. Secondly, it has become clear that not only was Achebe correct in saying that the Igbo value uniqueness, but that the entire communal structure of Igbo villages is built upon such a respect for differences. It is contrary to what Achebe

claims the West aims towards, then: society is not a prison that intends to restrain the individual from being him or herself; instead, the community is respectful and supportive of the individual person, much in the way that the artist is supported by the people around the artist as he or she works. Lastly, it is through the idea of friendship in the Derridean reading of Aristotle that the friendship of Obierika and Okonkwo becomes possible, as the friendship for Obierika is one involving uniqueness and the respecting of each person's individuality. In this respecting of solitudes between these two characters, we come full circle to the original claim by Achebe that the Igbo value uniqueness above all else.

I come to the final conclusion that Achebe's notion of *chi* and the respect for uniqueness that it posits is very similar to Derrida's reading of Aristotle and the respect for individuality that it points towards. While it may in fact be true that the generalized West that Achebe describes in "The Writer and His Community" is not accepting of differences in ways that the Igbo prove to be, it would be incorrect to say that the entire West lacks respect for individuality. For it is apparent that certain readings of one of the most recognized Western thinkers believes in the acceptance of difference and bases the entire idea of friendship and community on difference. The Igbo and the West, then, are not really that far apart in where they stand in regards to individualized subjectivity, then. For as has been discussed, *chi* and the Aristotelian respect for the uniqueness are, for all intents and purposes, extremely close: they serve to show that the individuality of every person and subsequent respect for it is the basis for all relationships in their respective worlds.

Notes

ⁱ According to the Oxford English Dictionary, an absolutist is “A person who holds certain principles to be absolute and unconditional, without exception or compromise”.

ⁱⁱ Akunna explains the relation between Chi Ukwu or Chukwu in the following manner: “We make sacrifices to the little gods, but when they fail and there is no one else to turn to we to Chukwu. It is right to do so. We approach a great man through his servants. But when his servants fail to help us, then we go to the last source of hope. We appear to pay greater attention to the little gods but that is not so. We worry them more because we are afraid to worry their master” (*Things* 102)

ⁱⁱⁱ Abiola Irele takes a different view of this. According to him, “[i]n the immediate context of the novel, Unoka’s refusal to conform to the prevailing ethos of the tribe is of course considered in wholly negative terms. More important, its subversive significance is forcefully repudiated by his son . . . who wills himself into becoming the antithesis of all that Unoka represents” (Irele 466)

^{iv} According to the Oxford English Dictionary, exemplary means, “Serving as a model or pattern, after which something may be made; archetypal” (oed.com)

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