

# Things Keep Falling Apart

Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is one of the most famous novels of all time. It stands as epitome of modern African literature. It therefore comes as a shock to see [a movement](#) opposed to *Things Fall Apart*. Calls for restrictions have occurred in Texas, Malaysia, and even the novel's homeland of Nigeria. Here, I will explain the reasons behind such calls, and why they are ultimately harmful.

*Things Fall Apart* is a novel about colonialism. More directly, it is a novel about the mechanisms by which colonial powers can take hold. The novel follows Okonkwo, a man of great standing in his home village of Umuofia. Through the course of the novel, Okonkwo faces tragedy and challenges. Some are at the hand of colonists and missionaries. Many are due to the cultural practices of his clan. It ends with Okonkwo death. He commits suicide.

It follows clearly why Malaysia and Texas would choose to ban this book. Malaysia is a former British colony and active member of the British Commonwealth. The grim depiction of colonialism, specifically English colonialism, directly threatens the active powers within the nation. Texas is also a product of colonialism. The myth of manifest destiny caused war, bloodshed, and the creation of Texas as an entity. The novel is thus a threat to both of these powers.

It does not seem a controversial opinion to say colonialism was wrong. It only scares the people who directly benefit from colonization. To them, any threat to colonial powers appears to be threat to civilization. Luckily, *Things Fall Apart* shows us that civilization existed before and can exist beyond colonialism. The novel dismantles any idea in the reader that colonial powers are more sophisticated or less brutal.

The more interesting call for bans comes from within Nigeria itself. The actor and writer Femi Robinson, who passed away in 2015, called for the [banning](#) of Achebe's novel in schools. Robinson believed that the depiction of Okonkwo places too much glory on warlike and angry individuals. He believed that Okonkwo is shown to be a role model for Nigerians and this novel only perpetuates hate.

It must be understood that Robinson's views are influenced by the Nigerian-Biafra War. The Republic of Biafra declared independence from greater Nigeria after a series of massacres against the Igbo people in 1966.

The war, which spanned from 1967-1970, was a bloody and terrible event which left nearly [two million dead](#). Most of the dead were children who starved because of Nigerian blockade of

foreign relief. Robinson possessed a terrible knowledge that Achbe did not have when he published *Things Fall Apart* in 1958.

Robinson saw the sympathetic character of Okonkwo, who was Igbo like the vast majority of Biafra, as inflammatory. The argument goes that *Things Fall Apart* entertains a moral of tribe mentality which can only beget violence. Nigeria is a diverse and populous country and the novel does nothing to bring the nation together. *Things Fall Apart* only serves to bring greater disharmony. Robinson went so far as to write the play *Things Come Together* in a hope to “counter” the “propaganda” of *Things Fall Apart*.

Of course, *Things Fall Apart* does not tell a message of hate. In fact, the novel takes great pains to show the possibility of unity within diverse cultures. The people of Umuofia are perfectly willing to accept the missionaries who come to their village. There is a true fondness they feel for Mr. Brown because he is willing to learn about them as a people. This may be in an effort to convert them, but at no point do the people at large want to turn to violence. Once the missionary Mr. Smith encourages the destruction of the cultural life of Umuofia, things become violent.

The aggressive tendencies of Okonkwo are never seen as a good thing. The beating of his wives, the killing of Ikemefuna, the harsh treatment of his sons are all seen through a negative light even if the novel takes the time to explain why Okonkwo does these things. At no point does *Things Fall Apart* uncritically proud of Okonkwo’s wrath.

If the people of Biafra saw themselves in Okonkwo, and Nigeria as a foreign power, then *Things Fall Apart* seemingly encourages an attempt at unity. However, this cannot always be. The English empire conquered Nigeria and it seems Nigeria demanded to conquer Biafra. There were [numerous attacks](#) on the Igbo people all across Nigeria, a tragic massacre happening in 1945. Violence was occurring against the Igbo people. At most, *Things Fall Apart* told an oppressed people to defend themselves. It did not start or cause any bloodshed.

This is the legacy of *Things Fall Apart*. A testament against oppression which is so powerful that colonial powers demand it be hidden. It is not a piece of art which glorifies violence, but rather it is a work which defends the oppressed. Achebe wants peace. But peace cannot be had while massacres and pogroms take place. If *Things Fall Apart* is violent, then it is not violence for its own sake. Rather, this novel encourages a people banding together to save itself from destruction. I do not know which reasonable person could stand against that.