

Human Rights Infringement in *Things Fall Apart*

The United for Human Rights states the Universal Declaration of Human Rights with thirty articles to protect human rights. According to the United Nations, human rights are based on the fact that human beings require dignity and respectful treatment. In Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, though the novel was written in 1958 with a late-1800s pre- and post-colonial setting, there is a lot to be seen in terms of human rights violations, which are largely shaped by culture in addition to the transition that took place during post-colonialism. These rights include Article 1, the right to equality at birth; Article 4, no slavery; Article 5, no torture or cruel, inhuman punishment; Article 9, no subjection to arbitrary arrest, detention, or exile; Article 10, equality to a fair and public hearing; Article 13, freedom of movement; Article 17, the right to property ownership with no arbitrary deprivation of property; Article 18, freedom of thought, religion, and belief; and Article 19, freedom of expression.

The right to equality at birth is violated for Ezinma, Ekwefi's daughter. Okonkwo constantly wishes Ezinma had been a son, as girls have less value, and she would have been a good replacement for his weak and lazy son, Nwoye. Okonkwo's father, Unoka, is also referred to as an Agbala, translating to a woman, simply because he is lazy and unproductive (Achebe 10). Women could also be replaced even after death. Achebe states how Udo's wife was replaced by a virgin from a neighboring village where his wife was killed (20). This is demeaning to women.

Article 4, which states that no person should be subjected to slavery, is violated when Ikemefuna is snatched from his family and taken away by Okonkwo as village property, where he is placed under Okonkwo's custody as a servant (Achebe 11). Article 5, which protects people from torture and cruel, inhuman punishment, is seen in wife beating (Achebe 21), together with a

violation of freedom of movement, as Okonkwo beats his wife because she had gone to make her hair and had not cooked food for him. Ikemefuna is also killed by Okonkwo, a fatherly figure to the boy, simply because of traditions (Achebe 66). Both are sad happenings that should not happen to people, especially from close family members.

The violation of Article 9, which protects people from being taken into exile, and Article 10, which protects the right to a public and fair hearing, affects Okonkwo when he commits a female crime by killing a man after his gun goes off during a burial ceremony (Achebe 87). He is soon sent into exile in his mother's homeland for seven years, and the property he leaves behind is burned, thus violating Article 13 and Article 17, which protect freedom of movement and the right against arbitrary deprivation of property. The violation of Article 18, freedom of thought, religion, and belief, is witnessed in the second setting of post-colonialism, where there is conflict in the community brought about by Christian missionaries who are preaching Christianity and making African religion look inferior. With such fears of the unknown, the protagonist finally commits suicide because he feels that he no longer fits into the new society, even though he has lived all his life observing traditions. Women are rarely allowed to exercise Article 19, freedom of expression. Achebe states that when Ikemefuna was being taken away from his father's house, his mother was not consulted or even allowed to talk, but could only weep bitterly (11). The virgin given to Udo as a wife replacement could also only take orders from the village elders.

Measures that can be taken to ensure human rights are not violated include creating awareness among citizens about their rights, setting up bodies that handle human rights issues, formulating laws, joining strong international organizations, and adopting standards, conventions, and declarations that are binding or adopted through modification. Truth commissions and

international war crimes tribunals can also be set up to handle such occurrences. Areas of conflict must also be given humanitarian aid and developmental assistance. These include peacekeeping missions and the creation of safe havens for refugees.

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