

Culture as A Complex of Activities of African Traditional Society in Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart

*Hadiyanto Hadiyanto*¹

¹English Literature Study Program, Faculty of Humanities, Diponegoro University, Indonesia

Abstract. This research paper analyzes culture as a complex of activities of African traditional society in a tribal, communal life in Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart. The objective of this research paper is to analyze the kinds of activities-related cultures or better known as social culture reflected in an Anglophone literary work Things Fall Apart. The research approach used in this research paper is literary anthropology endorsed with theory of general cultural forms and theory of seven cultural universals to analyze the social culture of the African traditional community reflected in the literary work. The results of the research indicate that African traditional society has several kinds of activity-related cultures such as, livelihood activity-related culture, capital loan activity-related culture, religion ritual activity-related culture, traditional language activity-related culture, marriage proposal activity-related culture, music and dance art activity-related culture.

¹ Corresponding author: hadiyanto_smg@yahoo.co.id

1 Introduction

Literature is an inseparable part of culture. As a product of culture, literature has a freedom to tell anything and to explore many things related to the life and cultural aspects of a society imaginatively, creatively, and rationally. Therefore, literary work is the representation of one of the typical colours of a culture. Literary work does not only function as a social documentation that portrays an individual's life in interacting with a group of society or ethnicity, but also means as a representation of culture which has already produced, expressed, and spined around it. Culture in anthropology perspective can be defined as the overall knowledge of humans' habitual attitude and behaviour that is possessed and inherited by a member of a certain group of society (Keesing, 2009:68)^[1]. Anthropology is also defined as the study of humans either pre-modern or modern people and their way of life (Harris, 1991:1)^[2]. The description of the typical colour of a culture of a certain society in literary works can be viewed, one of which, in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*.

Things Fall Apart is a novel which specifically and typically describes the background of traditional life and primitive culture of Ibo tribe society in Nigeria, Africa, and their reactions toward the coming of white people to the land of Africa. *Things Fall Apart* depicts typical culture of Ibo tribe society which is closely related to activities of everyday life. Ibo tribe society lives in groups with a tribe traditional life pattern deeply connected with gods' adoration, tribe war, mysticism, farming, and many more. In terms of traditional culture, basically, culture has three kinds of forms, namely culture as a complex of ideas or ideational culture, culture as a complex of activities or social culture, and material culture or physical culture (Honigmann, 2008:9) ^[3]. To discuss in a specific way, in this research paper, the writer would like to focus on analyzing and describing African traditional society which has several kinds of activity-related cultures such as, livelihood activity-related culture, capital loan activity-related culture, religion ritual activity-related culture, traditional language activity-related culture, marriage proposal activity-related culture, music and dance art activity-related culture.

2 Method of Research

2.1 Research Approach

Based on the background of the research that reveals human's activities and cultural phenomena of African traditional community in a literary work of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, the researcher uses anthropological approach in literature to analyze such related phenomena in the novel by focusing on the concept of culture as the complex of activities or social culture. Anthropological approach in literature is a literary research based on the point of view of ethnography to understand the cultural aspects in a society (Endraswara, 2008:107)^[4]. The relationship between anthropology and literature becomes the object of literary anthropology in this research paper. Literary anthropology learns how humans adapt and interact mutually in a certain culture.

2.2 Method of Data Collection

In relation to literary anthropology approach discussing cultural anthropology with humans' works such as, language, arts, tradition, and so forth reflected in literary works, the researcher in analyzing the texts uses method of data collection (Ratna, 2004:351)^[5]. Method of data collection is conducted to analyze Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* by using library research. Library research is research which is conducted in a working room or a library of a researcher to obtain data and information related to the object of the research through books or any other audio-visual appliances (Semi, 2012:10)^[6]. The researcher uses Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* novel as primary data of the research, whereas secondary data are taken from any other related written sources functioned as supporting data, such as reference textbooks, journals, articles, and so on.

3 Result and Discussion

3.1 Culture as a Complex of Activities

3.2.1 Livelihood Activity-Related Culture

Livelihood system as one of the components of humans' cultural universals belongs to all nation ethnicities including Ibo tribe society reflected in *Things Fall Apart*. In general, Ibo tribe society has livelihood activities as farmers culturally as the former ancestral heritage by doing some activities of cultivating the field to plant yams as their daily staple food beside cassava. They also plant groundnuts, string beans, green

melons, and corns between the mound soil of the planted yams. The main character as a member of Ibo tribe society cultivates land by growing yams with the method of his former ancestors. After the first rainy season comes, he plants hundreds of seeds of yams on the mound land as quoted: “Like all good farmers, Okonkwo had begun to sow with the first rains. He had sown four hundred seeds when the rains dried up and the heat returned.” (Achebe, 1958:19)^[7]

3.2.2 Capital Loan Activity-Related Culture

One of the forms of a complex of cultural activity in a native society of the Ibo tribe depicted in *Things Fall Apart* is the economic transaction activity which is typically carried out from generation to generation as viewed in the main character of the novel, Okonkwo, when doing a transaction of capital loan for the agricultural cultivation from Nwakibie, the richest figure in Ibo tribe society, who has three staple food big barns. Based on the previous cultural activity, the main character in getting the capital loan is visiting Nwakibie’s house by bringing along with a drinking pot of wine, a rooster, and a large pan of peanuts as a sincere respect of a guest as the given to the host as the giver of capital loan. The cultural regulation of capital loan transaction begins with the feast of drinking wine and eating boiled peanuts together. In Ibo tribe tradition, the man who is willing to borrow the agricultural capital is firstly given an honor to drink wine, then it is followed by the host as the giver of agricultural capital.

3.2.3 Religion Ritual Activity-Related Culture

Ibo tribe society reflected in *Things Fall Apart* performs some activities of a religious rituals glorified from generation to generation, such as the cultural activity of a welcoming rite of harvest season of yams which is also celebrated as a moment of the new year for Ibo tribe society. The cultural ritual of welcoming the new year is carried out every year to give a great honor the spirits of the Ibo ancestors and to extend the deepest gratitude to Ani as god of earth, in their cultural belief, god of land fertility for the life of Ibo tribe society. The New Yam yearly ritual means a lot for them as a sacred honor as reflected in the quotation: “The Feast of the New Yam was held every year before the harvest began, to honor the earth goddess and the ancestral spirits of the clan.” (Achebe, 1958:31)

3.2.4 Traditional Language Activity-Related Culture

The role of language is very important for a group of either traditional or modern society. It does not only function as a means of communication, but also as a means of unification of people and as a symbol of cultural identity for the society. This is also reflected in *Things Fall Apart*, the Ibo tribe society has also a traditional language which becomes the characteristics of their culture. The language of Ibo tribe appears dominantly through the activity of uttering the words of the main character, such as “*Umuofia Kwenu*”. “*Umuofia Kwenu*” is a phrase uttered by Ibo tribe people when they yell out loud to give a greeting as a sign of proud toward the land of Umofia where they live. Literally, “*Umuofia Kwenu*” means “the glory of the land of Umofia”. They also utter the phrase when they meet in the street, in the ritual crowd, and in the Ibo tribe meeting among the elders as quoted:

“Umuofia kwenu!” shouted the leading egwugwu, pushing the air with his rafia arms. The elders of the clan replied, “Yaa!”

“Umuofia kwenu!”

” Yaa!”

“Umuofia kwenu!”

” Yaa!”

(Achebe, 1958:79)

3.2.5 Marriage Proposal Activity-Related Culture

The Ibo tribe society reflected in *Things Fall Apart* has a unique traditional rule of marriage proposal and bride price payment to the spouse to-be. It is represented in the activity of marriage proposal done by a young man named Ibe to his wife to-be named Akueke. At first, the young man and his parents’ family visit the girl’s house to propose her as a wife. Based on the cultural tradition of Ibo tribe society, every guest who comes the girl’s house with a very important purpose is always served with much respect by being given the traditional food service *kola nuts* or African peanuts and a drinking pot of wine on a wooden plate as the honor of the host of girl’s family to the guests’ family. Meanwhile, the suitor family takes along with some traditional presents, such as earthen pots of the best wine made by the suitor family. In Ibo tribe tradition, the girl who is ready to be proposed is commonly 16 years old, whereas the young man as a suitor is about 25years old. This is represented in the following quotation: “The suitor was a young man of about twenty-five, and with him his father and

uncle. She was about sixteen and just ripe for marriage.” (Achebe, 1958:61-62)

3.2.6 Music And Dance Art Activity-Related Culture

Every culture usually has at least one music device as a means of expression of the sense of art and actualization of the inner voice of the people. Ibo tribe society also has the high sense of music reflected in the traditional activity and ability in playing traditional music in the form of playing big drums collectively as their cultural identity. This kind of big drums music art is popularly shown to accompany the traditional contest of wrestle in the village square as a sequence of the cultural activity in welcoming the harvest season or the new year of Ibo tribe society. The cultural activity of music skill to play big drums is reflected in the following quotation: The drums were still beating, persistent and unchanging. Their sound was no longer a separate thing from the living village. It was like pulsation of its heart. It throbbed in the air, in the sunshine, and even in the trees, and filled the village with excitement. (Achebe, 1958:38)

The cultural activity related to another kind of art belonging to the Ibo tribe society is also reflected in *Things Fall Apart*, that is, traditional dance art. This kind of art is performed by Ibo tribe society in certain traditional ceremonies and feasts, such as the traditional contest of wrestle in the village square and the feast of welcoming the harvest season or the new year of Ibo tribe society. In wrestle contest, they are facing the opponents from another village in a team consisting of 12 selected people. The 12 best wrestlers of Ibo tribe, one by one, shows the confidence of wrestling to go forward to the center of square by dancing spiritedly and pointing one of the opponents to go wrestling with him. The activity of traditional dance art of Ibo tribe society in the wrestling contest can be viewed in the following quotation: The two teams were ranged facing each other across the clear space. A young man from one team danced across the center to the other side and pointed at whomever he wanted to fight. They danced back to the center together and then closed in. (Achebe, 1958:43)

4 Conclusion

Culture as a complex of activities or social culture of the African traditional society is reflected in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. The African traditional society, at this point, Ibo tribe society has several kinds

of activity-related cultures such as, livelihood activity-related culture, capital loan activity-related culture, religion ritual activity-related culture, traditional language activity-related culture, marriage proposal activity-related culture, music, and dance art activity-related culture.

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