

**INTERDEPENDENT CULTURAL AND POSTCOLONIAL DIMENSIONS OF VIOLENCE IN CHINUA ACHEBE'S *THINGS FALL APART***

*Dimensi Kultural dan Postkolonial yang Saling Bergantung dalam Kekerasan di Novel Things Fall Apart karya Chinua Achebe*

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**Abstract**

*Existing scholarship on Things Fall Apart tends to examine indigenous and colonial forms of violence as separate analytical domains, leaving their interconnections underexplored. This study aims to analyze how domestic, ritual, ideological, and structural forms of violence operate as an interdependent system within the novel. Employing a descriptive–interpretive qualitative approach, the study draws on 42 purposively selected textual excerpts from the 2000 edition of the novel. Data were collected through textual documentation and analyzed using close reading and thematic coding informed by postcolonial and gender theory. The findings reveal that violence in the novel operates as a recursive and multi-layered system. Internally sanctioned forms of violence, particularly patriarchal control and culturally legitimized practices, sustain social order while simultaneously generating structural vulnerabilities. These vulnerabilities are subsequently exploited by colonial forces through ideological delegitimization and institutional domination, indicating a shift from physical toward epistemic and symbolic forms of violence. Acts of resistance, although grounded in indigenous moral logic, produce ambivalent outcomes by restoring symbolic authority while provoking intensified repression. These results demonstrate that violence in Things Fall Apart functions as a cyclical and mutually reinforcing process across personal, cultural, and political domains. The study contributes by offering an integrated analytical framework that bridges postcolonial and gender perspectives, while highlighting the novel’s relevance for understanding cultural resilience, identity reconstruction, and the ethical complexities of resistance in postcolonial contexts.*

**Keywords:** *Things Fall Apart; violence; postcolonial criticism; patriarchy; cultural resistance.*

**Abstrak**

Kajian-kajian sebelumnya pada *Things Fall Apart* cenderung meneliti bentuk-bentuk kekerasan pribumi dan kolonial sebagai domain analitis yang terpisah, sehingga keterkaitannya kurang dieksplorasi. Studi ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis bagaimana bentuk-bentuk kekerasan domestik, ritual, ideologis, dan struktural beroperasi sebagai sistem yang saling bergantung dalam novel tersebut. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif-interpretatif, studi ini mengambil 42 kutipan teks yang dipilih secara purposif dari edisi novel tahun 2000. Data dikumpulkan melalui dokumentasi tekstual dan dianalisis menggunakan pembacaan cermat dan pengkodean tematik yang didasarkan pada teori pasakolonial dan gender. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa kekerasan dalam novel beroperasi sebagai sistem rekursif dan berlapis-lapis. Bentuk-bentuk kekerasan yang disetujui secara internal, khususnya kontrol patriarki dan praktik-praktik yang dilegitimasi secara budaya, mempertahankan tatanan sosial sekaligus menghasilkan kerentanan struktural. Kerentanan ini kemudian dieksploitasi oleh kekuatan kolonial melalui delegitimasi ideologis dan dominasi institusional, yang menunjukkan pergeseran dari bentuk

kekerasan fisik menuju bentuk kekerasan epistemik dan simbolik. Tindakan perlawanan, meskipun berlandaskan logika moral pribumi, menghasilkan hasil yang ambivalen dengan memulihkan otoritas simbolik sekaligus memicu represi yang lebih intensif. Hasil ini menunjukkan bahwa kekerasan dalam *Things Fall Apart* berfungsi sebagai proses siklik dan saling memperkuat di berbagai domain pribadi, budaya, dan politik. Studi ini berkontribusi dengan menawarkan kerangka analitis terintegrasi yang menjembatani perspektif pascakolonial dan gender, sekaligus menyoroti relevansi novel ini untuk memahami ketahanan budaya, rekonstruksi identitas, dan kompleksitas etika perlawanan dalam konteks pascakolonial.

**Kata-kata kunci:** *Things Fall Apart*; kekerasan; kritik postkolonial; patriarki; resistensi kultural.

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## INTRODUCTION

Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* invites readers to critically examine gender dynamics within Igbo society, particularly the ways power, masculinity, and cultural authority are constructed and contested. In postcolonial literary studies, the novel is widely recognized as a foundational text for examining the intersection of indigenous cultural systems and colonial intervention, making it highly relevant for understanding dynamics of power and resistance. Rather than functioning merely as a historical backdrop, violence in the novel operates as a dynamic and symbolically charged force that exposes shifting power relations and evolving forms of resistance (Ilyas, 2024; Azad, 2025). Achebe intricately situates violence within the domains of personal identity, communal cohesion, and colonial confrontation, positioning it simultaneously as an instrument of dominance and a strategy of survival. This layered representation suggests that violence in the novel cannot be fully understood through a single analytical lens, but requires a more integrative approach. Within sociocultural formations, systems of language and communication also play a crucial role in reproducing cultural values and regulating power relations, as literature functions as an interactive medium that shapes meaning across cultural and ideological boundaries in the digital and multicultural era (Sari, 2024; Efrizah, 2025). Building on these intersecting discussions of gender, power, and representation, Eze (2021) argues that violence and masculinity in African fiction are structurally intertwined, shaping both identity formation and social hierarchy.

At the center of the narrative stands Okonkwo, a tragic figure whose understanding of masculinity is inseparable from the performance of violence. As a central figure in the narrative, Okonkwo embodies tensions between cultural preservation and colonial disruption (Achebe, 2021; Purwarno & Efrizah, 2025). Determined to distance himself from his father's legacy of perceived weakness, he embraces an aggressive patriarchal ethos grounded in martial achievement. Suharjanto (2022) characterizes Okonkwo's ego as rigid and aggressive, shaped by an aversion to compromise and an obsessive need to assert strength. Previous studies consistently show that such constructions of masculinity are not purely individual, but are socially and culturally reinforced through norms that legitimize coercion and authority (Siddique, 2020; Rhoads, 1993; Olugunle, 2018; Daikh, 2024; Umeh, 2024; Joshi, 2023)).

His use of violence within domestic and communal spaces reflects the internalization of patriarchal norms as a mechanism of social legitimacy. From a psychoanalytic perspective, Mumu (2023) interprets Okonkwo's violence as stemming from deep-seated anxieties about weakness and the loss of masculine identity. This psychological dimension is further reinforced by Salman (2021), who highlights how fear of vulnerability contributes to the normalization of violent behavior. Yet his eventual downfall exposes the limitations of equating power with brutality (Goldstein, 2021). Achebe constructs this trajectory as a cautionary narrative highlighting the risks of rigid masculinity under the pressures of colonial transformation. Haque (2025) further emphasizes that Okonkwo's exile symbolizes the collapse of traditional authority under colonial disruption, reinforcing the psychological disintegration of masculine identity.

Scholarly discussions have consistently emphasized how the novel encodes masculinity within broader cultural logics. Achebe's language reinforces masculine dominance, while Okonkwo's construction of violent masculinity can be interpreted as a response to colonial and cultural tensions, where violence becomes embedded in broader critiques of colonial domination and identity formation (Reddeman, 2023). Siddique (2020) similarly argues that cultural expectations of manhood often legitimize violent conduct, and Adegbite (2016) highlights the tension between traditional Igbo masculinity and emerging colonial norms. Taken together, these studies foreground masculinity as a central concern, yet they tend to prioritize internal cultural analysis over its interaction with broader colonial structures. Shahid et al. (2024) argue that violence functions to reinforce male supremacy, while also revealing contradictions between dominant and alternative identities, particularly in the character of Nwoye (Daikh, 2024; Umeh, 2024).

Gender relations in postcolonial fiction are shaped by overlapping structures of identity, culture, and colonial power. Eze (2021) argues that masculinity in African literature is not static but continuously reconstructed through violence, power, and resistance, reflecting its contested and evolving nature within postcolonial contexts. Complementing this perspective, violence in the novel can also be understood as embedded in broader structures of colonial power and cultural tension, where acts of resistance are shaped by unequal relations of domination (Reddeman, 2023).

Beyond the personal and cultural dimensions of masculinity, violence in the novel also operates structurally through the expanding machinery of British colonialism. The arrival of Christian missionaries and colonial administrators destabilizes the spiritual and political foundations of Igbo life. This process reflects a broader pattern of cultural conflict in which colonial forces impose new ideological and institutional systems that undermine indigenous authority and belief structures (Azad, 2025). The humiliation of Umuofia's elders further illustrates how colonial violence operates through both symbolic and institutional mechanisms, reinforcing domination and delegitimizing local governance. Egoro-Glines (2018) conceptualizes this as an ontological restructuring of indigenous life, a process in which external systems reshape identity, legitimacy, and social reality. These findings indicate that colonial violence functions not only as external domination but also as a systematic restructuring of indigenous authority and identity (Daher et al., 2025; Winter, 2024). Comparable patterns of domination are also identified in other postcolonial literary contexts (Efrizah & Purwarno, 2026).

At the same time, Achebe complicates any simplistic moral binary by portraying violence as a potential mode of resistance. The destruction of the colonial church by the Umuofia community represents a moment of collective agency and cultural assertion (Gikandi, 2020). Recent scholarship suggests that violence in colonial contexts operates as both a cultural assertion and a political strategy shaped by unequal power relations and colonial domination (Reddeman, 2023). Extending this to the gendered domain, Olugunle (2018), Fariha (2025), and Muhlisin and Syahid (2025) highlight how both colonial and indigenous systems legitimize domination,

particularly over women. This suggests that systems of violence are not only externally imposed but also internally reproduced.

Despite the breadth of existing scholarship, most studies tend to examine masculinity, cultural violence, and colonial domination as separate analytical concerns. A review of literature accessed through Google Scholar and Scopus using keywords such as “*Things Fall Apart*,” “violence,” “masculinity,” and “colonialism” indicates that integrative analyses that examine the interaction between personal, cultural, and colonial forms of violence within a single framework remain limited (Ottuh, 2025; Daikh, 2024). This gap highlights the need for a more comprehensive approach that accounts for the interconnected nature of multiple forms of violence.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze the representation of violence in *Things Fall Apart* by examining the interrelated roles of personal trauma, patriarchal structures, and colonial power. The study is guided by the following objectives: (1) to identify the forms of violence represented in the novel; (2) to analyze how these forms of violence interact as an interdependent system; and (3) to examine how such interactions reflect broader dynamics of power, domination, and resistance.

## **METHOD**

### **Research Design**

This study employs a qualitative interpretive methodology grounded in literary and cultural analysis, guided by the Descriptive-Interpretive Qualitative Research (DIQR) framework (Elliott et al., 2024). This approach is selected because the study aims to analyze and interpret how multiple forms of violence operate as an interdependent system within a literary text, rather than to measure variables, making qualitative interpretation more appropriate than quantitative approaches. This approach is particularly appropriate for uncovering the socio-cultural structures embedded in literary texts. Through this framework, the study examines how violence in *Things Fall Apart* reflects broader social, cultural, and ideological dynamics within Igbo society as represented by Chinua Achebe.

### **Population, Sampling, and Data Sources**

The population of this study comprises the full range of narrative events and dialogues in Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* (2000 edition) that depict forms of violence, masculinity, and colonial encounters. From this population, purposive sampling was employed to select passages directly relevant to the research objectives.

The selection of the 42 excerpts was guided by the following criteria: (1) passages that explicitly depict forms of violence, including personal (domestic), ritual, ideological, and structural (colonial) violence; (2) passages that illustrate constructions or performances of masculinity; (3) passages that represent interactions between indigenous structures and colonial power; and (4) passages that demonstrate the interdependence between at least two forms of violence. Passages that did not meet these criteria were excluded to ensure analytical focus.

A total of 42 textual excerpts from the novel were identified as primary data. The secondary data consisted of 34 scholarly sources. The secondary sources were categorized based on their theoretical contribution and relevance to postcolonial theory, gender studies, and literary violence. The sources were retrieved from major academic databases and scholarly platforms, including Google Scholar, Cambridge Core, JSTOR, an institutional repository, and publisher databases. The data collection strategy reflects a diversified academic sourcing approach across multiple reputable platforms.

The inclusion criteria for secondary sources were: (1) publication within the last ten years, with the exception of seminal theoretical works in postcolonial and gender studies (e.g., Bha-

bha, Fanon, and Uchendu); (2) direct relevance to postcolonial theory, gender studies, or African literary criticism; and (3) publication in reputable academic journals, edited volumes, conference proceedings, or academic presses.

### **Instruments and Data Collection Procedures**

The primary research instrument was a researcher-developed coding sheet supported by a thematic analysis framework. Primary data were collected through systematic close reading of the novel, during which relevant excerpts were coded according to predetermined thematic categories, namely personal (domestic) violence, ritual violence, ideological violence, and structural (colonial) violence.

The coding sheet consisted of several components, including: excerpt identification, narrative context, type of violence, interacting forms of violence, characters involved, and preliminary interpretive notes. This structure enabled the researcher to systematically identify not only individual forms of violence but also their interrelationships across the narrative.

Secondary data were gathered through targeted keyword searches (“*Things Fall Apart*,” “violence,” “masculinity,” and “colonialism”) across the selected databases. Each source was critically evaluated for theoretical relevance, scholarly credibility, and analytical contribution prior to inclusion.

### **Data Analysis and Interpretation**

Data analysis proceeded through three interrelated stages:

1. Thematic coding was conducted by categorizing selected excerpts from the primary text according to forms of violence, including personal (domestic), ritual, ideological, and structural (colonial) violence, informed by postcolonial criticism and gender theory.
2. Interpretive synthesis was carried out by examining the coded data to identify recurring patterns, ideological tensions, and interdependent relationships among different forms of violence in the novel.
3. Comparative contextualization was undertaken by situating the findings within broader scholarly conversations and comparing them with insights from the secondary literature on masculinity, colonialism, and resistance.

To enhance analytical transparency, each stage was conducted systematically: initial coding was performed line by line, followed by grouping codes into broader thematic categories, and finally analyzing how different forms of violence interact and reinforce one another across narrative contexts.

The interpretive process was iterative and recursive, involving continuous movement between textual evidence and theoretical frameworks to ensure analytical depth and coherence. Consistency of interpretation was maintained by repeatedly revisiting coded excerpts and comparing interpretations across similar cases, ensuring that conclusions about interdependence were based on recurring patterns rather than isolated examples.

### **Trustworthiness and Rigor**

To ensure methodological rigor, the study adhered to established qualitative trustworthiness criteria. Credibility was strengthened through sustained engagement with the primary text and repeated close readings to ensure accurate thematic identification. Dependability was supported by maintaining a systematic coding protocol and a transparent analytical framework documenting the development of thematic categories.

Confirmability was enhanced by grounding interpretations firmly in textual evidence and by cross-referencing findings with established postcolonial and gender scholarship. Transfer-

bility was addressed through detailed contextualization of selected excerpts and clear documentation of analytical procedures, enabling readers to evaluate the applicability of the findings to comparable postcolonial literary contexts.

Reflexivity was incorporated by acknowledging the researcher's position as a literary scholar working within postcolonial and gender frameworks, which may influence interpretive emphasis. To minimize bias, interpretations were continuously checked against textual evidence and relevant scholarship.

Throughout the process, the researcher maintained reflexive awareness to minimize subjective bias and preserve interpretive transparency.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **RESULTS**

This section presents the findings in relation to the study's aim of analyzing representations of violence in *Things Fall Apart* through postcolonial and gender perspectives. The findings are derived from a thematic coding process that identifies five interrelated categories of violence: (1) Domestic Violence and Patriarchal Control, (2) Ritual Violence and Cultural Legitimacy, (3) Ideological Violence and Religious Absolutism, (4) Structural Colonial Violence, and (5) Resistance through Violence. Each category is presented in the following subsections, supported by primary textual evidence and relevant scholarly engagement. This structure enables a triangulated interpretation situated within both Igbo socio-cultural contexts and broader postcolonial discourse.

#### **Thematic Categories of Violence**

The thematic coding process identified five interrelated categories of violence, which are presented and discussed below.

##### ***Domestic Violence and Patriarchal Control***

Domestic violence appears in the novel as a recurring and socially normalized form of aggression closely tied to constructions of masculinity. Okonkwo's authority within the household is frequently expressed through physical punishment, which functions both as discipline and as a visible assertion of patriarchal power. Achebe situates these actions within Igbo socio-cultural expectations that male authority in the household should remain publicly affirmed.

A prominent example occurs when Okonkwo beats Ojiugo during the sacred Week of Peace:

*"Okonkwo was not the man to stop beating somebody halfway through, not even for fear of a goddess" (Achebe, 2000, p. 29).*

This episode demonstrates Okonkwo's prioritization of masculine authority over religious injunctions. The Week of Peace, dedicated to Ani, prohibits violence to preserve communal harmony and agricultural fertility. In Igbo cosmology, Ani is not merely a symbolic deity but the supreme moral authority associated with the earth, fertility, and social order. As the guardian of both agricultural productivity and ethical conduct, Ani represents the foundation of cosmic balance within the community. Therefore, the Week of Peace functions as a sacred period in which all forms of conflict must be suspended to ensure harmony between humans, the land, and the spiritual realm.

From this perspective, Okonkwo's act is not simply a domestic violation but a transgression against the cosmic order itself. By committing violence during this sacred period, he disrupts the moral and spiritual equilibrium that sustains communal life, thereby elevating the act from a private offense to a collective and metaphysical breach. This violation places personal authority in tension with communal spiritual norms.

Rhoads (1993) characterizes Okonkwo's behavior as reflective of a hypermasculine model that privileges dominance over communal restraint. Similarly, domestic violence in the novel can be interpreted as a manifestation of patriarchal structures that normalize the subordination of women within Igbo society (Fariha, 2025). The episode also anticipates later narrative developments in which Okonkwo's rigid adherence to masculine ideals contributes to increasing social and personal strain. The act of beating Ojiugo reflects a form of patriarchal control in which physical violence is used to regulate women's behavior and reinforce male dominance within the household. In this context, women are often subjected to various forms of physical and social violence, reflecting entrenched gender inequalities (Fariha, 2025; Muhlisin & Syahid, 2025).

### ***Ritual Violence and Cultural Legitimacy***

Achebe also depicts forms of violence that are socially sanctioned and embedded within Igbo moral frameworks. Unlike impulsive domestic aggression, these acts are presented as culturally regulated and communally authorized. The most significant example is the killing of Ikemefuna.

*"He was afraid of being thought weak" (Achebe, 2000, p. 61).*

The narrative links Okonkwo's participation in the killing to social expectations surrounding masculine strength. Although Ezeudu advises him not to take part, Okonkwo delivers the fatal blow. The episode illustrates how communal definitions of strength may override personal attachment.

Siddique (2020) notes that ritual killings in the novel reinforce communal authority structures. At the same time, the episode produces visible psychological effects, particularly in Nwoye's growing emotional distance from both his father and traditional practices (Rhoads, 1993).

The killing of Ikemefuna therefore functions both as an affirmation of communal order and as a moment that introduces internal tension within the family and the wider community.

### ***Ideological Violence and Religious Absolutism***

With the arrival of colonial missionaries, the narrative increasingly foregrounds ideological forms of violence. This shift is embodied in Reverend James Smith, whose leadership contrasts with the earlier accommodationist approach of Mr. Brown. Smith frames religious difference in binary moral terms:

*"He saw things as black and white. And black was evil" (Achebe, 2000, p. 130).*

Within the narrative context, "black" becomes associated with indigenous religious practices, which Smith positions as morally illegitimate. Egoro-Glines (2018) further conceptualizes such processes as ontological violence, in which colonial discourse reshapes fundamental categories of identity and truth.

Under Smith's leadership, tensions between converts and traditional authorities intensify, culminating in the desecration of the sacred masquerade. These findings indicate that ideological confrontation in the novel operates alongside, and sometimes precedes, physical coercion.

### ***Structural Colonial Violence***

Colonial authority in the novel is also expressed through institutional mechanisms that restructure indigenous governance. This is evident in the arrest and public humiliation of Umuofia's elders:

*"The court messengers... shaved off all the hair on the men's heads" (Achebe, 2000, p. 138).*

In Igbo culture, elders’ hair signifies status and authority. Its forced removal publicly diminishes their symbolic standing. More specifically, within Igbo socio-cultural frameworks, physical appearance including hair is closely tied to age hierarchy, dignity, and social legitimacy. Elders, as custodians of tradition and communal wisdom, embody authority not only through their roles but also through visible cultural markers that distinguish them from younger members of the society. From this perspective, the act of shaving their heads represents more than physical degradation; it constitutes a deliberate symbolic violation of identity and status. By stripping the elders of these visible markers, colonial agents effectively dismantle their cultural authority and reframe them as subjects within a new colonial hierarchy. This act therefore functions as a form of symbolic dispossession, where power is not only taken but publicly re-defined.

The episode illustrates how colonial administration combines legal procedure with performative humiliation. Edoro-Glines (2018) notes that these practices function to redefine legitimate authority within the colonial order. The findings suggest that structural violence in the novel operates through both material control and symbolic displacement.

### Resistance through Violence

Violence in the narrative also emerges as a mode of communal resistance. The destruction of the Christian church by the Egwugwu represents the most prominent example:

*“The spirits of the clan had been angered... they set fire to the church” (Achebe, 2000, p. 137).*

Within the narrative, the Egwugwu act as custodians of ancestral authority. Their decision to burn the church follows the desecration of a sacred masquerade, indicating a response framed within indigenous judicial logic.

Gikandi (2020) interprets the episode as an assertion of cultural sovereignty. Acts of resistance in colonial contexts often provoke intensified structures of domination, demonstrating that violence operates within asymmetrical power relations shaped by colonial authority (Reddleman, 2023).

### Summary of Coded Data and Triangulation

The thematic coding process identified 42 primary textual excerpts distributed across the five thematic categories presented below. Each category is supported by both direct textual evidence and relevant scholarly interpretation, providing methodological triangulation and strengthening the analytical credibility of the findings. The distribution of excerpts across the thematic categories is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of Thematic Codes and Types of Violence in *Things Fall Apart*

Theme	Number of Excerpts	Key References	Interpretive Insight
Domestic Violence and Patriarchal Control	9	Rhoads (1993); Fariha (2025); Muhlisin & Syahid (2025)	Household as site of patriarchal enforcement and gendered discipline
Ritual Violence and Cultural Legitimacy	8	Siddique (2020); Rhoads (1993)	Violence legitimized by communal tradition but creates moral rupture
Ideological Violence and Religious Absolutism	7	Eze (2021); Edoro-Glines (2018)	Moral absolutism and epistemic domination through religious binaries
Structural Colonial Violence	9	Edoro-Glines (2018); Azad (2025); Winter (2024); Daher et al. (2025)	Bureaucratic and symbolic colonial domination reshaping authority
Resistance through Violence	9	Gikandi (2020); Reddleman (2023); Azad (2025)	Violence as cultural assertion under asymmetrical colonial power

*Source: Author’s own analysis based on thematic coding of Achebe’s Things Fall Apart (2000 edition)*

This triangulated approach ensures that each theme is supported by at least two layers of evidence, direct textual analysis and scholarly interpretation enhancing the validity of the findings.

### **Integrated Interpretation of Findings**

The interplay between personal, ritual, ideological, and structural violence in *Things Fall Apart* reveals a cyclical, mutually reinforcing dynamic operating across multiple levels of Igbo society under colonial pressure. These forms of violence emerging from both internal practices and external impositions function not as isolated events but as interconnected processes shaped by shifting colonial power relations.

Endogenous violence, manifested in domestic discipline and ritual enforcement, serves to maintain internal order and affirm cultural identity. Okonkwo's punishments and the execution of Ikemefuna are embedded within patriarchal and spiritual frameworks that sustain communal cohesion. Yet these same practices generate internal fractures and moral dissonance, evident in Nwoye's alienation, thereby exposing structural vulnerabilities within the community.

Exogenous violence, operating through ideological and institutional mechanisms, exploits these vulnerabilities. Reverend Smith's absolutist theology delegitimizes indigenous belief systems, while colonial administrative humiliation of elders undermines traditional governance. Colonial authority thus becomes embedded not only through coercion but through the reconfiguration of cultural and moral legitimacy.

Violent resistance emerges in response to both internal erosion and colonial intrusion. The Ekwugwu's destruction of the church reasserts indigenous agency but simultaneously provokes intensified colonial retaliation, illustrating the paradox of resistance within asymmetrical power structures.

This cyclical configuration supports Edoro-Glines' (2018) concept of ontological violence, in which the struggle extends beyond physical domination to the reconfiguration of identity, legitimacy, and ways of being. Ontological violence operates through the imposition of dominant values and systems that reshape social relations and undermine indigenous frameworks of meaning (Daher et al., 2025). In this sense, *Things Fall Apart* can be understood not merely as a historical representation but as a critical site for examining how violence is embedded, normalized, and reproduced within colonial encounters, particularly through the marginalization and delegitimization of indigenous identities (Winter, 2024).

This interdependence between individual and communal destiny is reinforced by Chukwumezie and Ezech (2023), who argue that Okonkwo's tragic downfall cannot be separated from the structural negligence and moral fragility of Umuofia, suggesting that both personal fate and communal collapse are mutually constitutive within Achebe's narrative framework.

### **DISCUSSION**

This discussion interprets the findings in relation to scholarship on *Things Fall Apart*, postcolonial theory, gender studies, and African literary criticism. Grounded in a descriptive–interpretive qualitative framework (Elliott et al., 2024), the analysis moves beyond thematic identification to examine how multiple forms of violence operate as mutually reinforcing systems within the novel. Rather than functioning as discrete phenomena, the findings demonstrate that precolonial and colonial violences are structurally interdependent. Domestic, ritual, ideological, and structural forms of violence form a cyclical matrix that shapes both individual subjectivity and communal stability. This study therefore reframes Achebe's narrative not merely as a representation of cultural conflict but as a layered system of interacting power relations across gender, spirituality, and governance. The discussion integrates both contemporary and classical scholarship in postcolonial and gender studies to ensure analytical balance.

### **Domestic Violence and Patriarchal Control**

The findings indicate that domestic violence in *Things Fall Apart* is embedded within culturally sanctioned constructions of masculinity. Okonkwo's violence, particularly the beating of Ojiugo during the Week of Peace functions not merely as individual aggression but as the performative enactment of patriarchal authority within the household. Consistent with Rhoads (1993), this behavior reflects a hypermasculine model that privileges dominance and emotional restraint. However, the present study extends this view by demonstrating that such violence is not only socially legitimized but also structurally functional in maintaining gender hierarchy. In this context, violence operates as a regulatory mechanism through which male authority is asserted and reinforced.

At the same time, the findings reveal an internal contradiction. The same patriarchal logic that sustains authority simultaneously produces psychological strain and social fragility. This is particularly visible in Nwoye's emotional alienation, which signals the limits of coercive masculinity. This dual dynamic demonstrates that domestic violence and patriarchal dominance function not only as mechanisms of control but also as sources of tension and instability within the narrative (Fariha, 2025; Muhlisin & Syahid, 2025). Within the broader cultural context of Igbo society, such gender relations are embedded in hierarchical social structures that regulate behavior and authority (Uchendu, 1965). Achebe's narrative further complicates these dynamics by exposing their long-term psychological and intergenerational consequences, particularly through patterns of familial breakdown and emotional displacement. Thus, patriarchal control in the novel is not a static cultural norm but a contested structure that generates both cohesion and fracture.

### **Ritual Violence and Cultural Legitimacy**

Ritual violence in the novel operates as a culturally regulated mechanism that reinforces communal order while simultaneously generating moral tension. The killing of Ikemefuna exemplifies how violence is legitimized through collective norms rather than individual intention. Siddique (2020) emphasizes their role in maintaining communal cohesion. The present findings, however, highlight a critical tension: although ritual violence affirms social order, it also produces emotional rupture and ethical ambiguity.

This contradiction is most evident in Nwoye's response, which signals a growing disconnection from traditional values. The findings therefore suggest that ritual violence functions not only as a mechanism of cultural continuity but also as a catalyst for internal fragmentation. In this sense, communal legitimacy does not eliminate moral conflict but rather displaces it into the psychological domain.

By foregrounding this tension, the study extends existing interpretations by demonstrating that culturally sanctioned violence can simultaneously sustain and destabilize the very structures it is meant to preserve.

### **Ideological Violence and Religious Absolutism**

The findings reveal that ideological violence emerges prominently with the arrival of colonial missionaries, marking a shift from physical to epistemic forms of domination. Reverend Smith's absolutist worldview exemplifies ideological violence in which alternative belief systems are delegitimized through rigid binary moral frameworks.

Edoro-Glines (2018) conceptualizes this process as ontological violence, where colonial discourse restructures not only systems of belief but also identity, legitimacy, and social belonging. Similarly, Eze (2021) emphasizes that violence in African fiction is closely tied to the production of meaning, power, and resistance, particularly through the construction of moral hierarchies that privilege one epistemology over another.

Unlike earlier missionary approaches, Smith's rigid stance intensifies conflict and erodes the possibility of intercultural negotiation. The findings further indicate that ideological violence operates as a precursor to structural domination. By redefining moral legitimacy, colonial discourse prepares the ground for institutional control. Thus, violence in this form is not immediately visible but operates through symbolic and discursive transformation. This shift underscores a critical transition in the novel: violence becomes increasingly embedded in systems of meaning rather than solely in physical acts, making it more pervasive and difficult to resist.

### **Structural Colonial Violence**

Structural colonial violence in the novel operates through institutional mechanisms that systematically undermine indigenous authority. The humiliation of Umuofia's elders illustrates how colonial power is exercised not only through physical coercion but also through symbolic degradation.

Edoro-Glines (2018) frames such actions as part of a broader process of ontological restructuring. The present findings extend these interpretations by showing how administrative procedures function as performative acts that reconfigure legitimacy and authority within the colonial order.

This form of violence is particularly effective because it is normalized through institutional practice. By embedding domination within legal and bureaucratic systems, colonial authority transforms coercion into an appearance of order and legitimacy.

As a result, indigenous structures are not only displaced but rendered obsolete, highlighting the systemic nature of colonial violence as both material and symbolic.

### **Resistance through Violence**

Violence in the novel also emerges as a form of resistance, particularly in response to colonial intrusion and cultural destabilization. The destruction of the church by the Ekwugwu represents a symbolic assertion of indigenous authority and cultural sovereignty. Gikandi (2020) interprets this act as a form of collective agency. However, the present findings highlight its ambivalent consequences: while resistance restores symbolic legitimacy, it simultaneously provokes intensified colonial retaliation. This dynamic reflects the broader tensions of cultural conflict in which acts of resistance, although aimed at preserving indigenous identity, often accelerate social fragmentation and external domination (Azad, 2025).

Violence as resistance thus operates within an asymmetrical power structure, where acts of cultural defense are both necessary and strategically risky. The findings suggest that resistance cannot be understood as purely emancipatory but must be seen within the constraints imposed by colonial dominance.

### **Interdependence of Multiple Forms of Violence**

Synthesizing the five thematic categories, the findings demonstrate that violence in *Things Fall Apart* operates as an interdependent system rather than as isolated phenomena. A recurring pattern emerges:

- a. domestic and ritual violence sustain internal order but generate structural vulnerabilities;
- b. ideological and structural colonial violence exploit these vulnerabilities;
- c. violent resistance attempts to restore agency but triggers further repression.

This cyclical dynamic supports Edoro-Glines' (2018) concept of ontological violence while extending it by demonstrating how multiple forms of violence interact across personal, cultural, and political levels. This dynamic further aligns with postcolonial theoretical perspectives.

Fanon's (2004) analysis of internalized domination further illuminates how indigenous structures may inadvertently reinforce colonial power, while Bhabha's (1994) concept of hybridity helps explain identity transformation, particularly in Nwoye's conversion. This perspective is further supported by Eze (2021), who emphasizes that identity formation in postcolonial literature is shaped through shifting relations of power, resistance, and cultural negotiation. His shift can be interpreted not only as religious change but as an affective response to both patriarchal pressure and colonial disruption.

Thus, the novel reveals violence as a recursive system in which internal and external forces continuously reshape one another. Supporting this view, Chukwumezie and Ezeh (2023) emphasize that Okonkwo's tragedy emerges at the intersection of individual agency and communal failure, where personal actions and societal negligence converge to produce an irreversible collapse of both identity and cultural stability.

### **Contribution to Scholarship and Global Relevance**

This study contributes to Achebe scholarship by integrating domestic, ritual, ideological, and structural violence within a single analytical framework. Unlike previous studies that examine these dimensions separately, the present research demonstrates their structural interdependence.

Three main contributions can be identified:

- a. bridging the analytical divide between indigenous patriarchal violence and colonial domination;
- b. conceptualizing violence as a cyclical and interdependent system;
- c. situating *Things Fall Apart* within a broader comparative postcolonial context.

The findings also resonate with global postcolonial experiences, including indigenous resistance and cultural preservation across different contexts, where struggles over identity, legitimacy, and cultural continuity continue to shape social realities (Winter, 2024; Daher et al., 2025; Azad, 2025). By positioning Achebe's novel within both African and global literary discourse, this study underscores its continuing relevance for understanding cultural resilience, identity reconstruction, and the ethics of resistance under colonial pressure.

### **CONCLUSION**

This study demonstrates that violence in *Things Fall Apart* operates as an interconnected system linking domestic, ritual, ideological, and structural dimensions. Rather than functioning as isolated acts, these forms of violence interact to produce shifting configurations of power, cultural authority, and subjectivity within the narrative. The findings show that internally sanctioned practices rooted in patriarchal and communal norms may inadvertently create structural vulnerabilities that enable colonial domination. At the same time, acts of resistance, while symbolically significant, unfold within asymmetrical power relations that limit their transformative potential. This highlights the paradoxical nature of violence as both a mechanism of social cohesion and a source of systemic instability. The study contributes to postcolonial literary studies by proposing an integrated analytical framework that connects gendered violence, cultural authority, and colonial power within a unified interpretive model. Beyond its textual analysis, the study suggests that similar patterns of interdependent violence may be observed in other postcolonial literary contexts. Future research may extend this framework through comparative and interdisciplinary approaches to examine how interdependent forms of violence operate across other postcolonial literary texts and contexts.

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