

**I.B. Extended Essay**

**Subject: Group 1 – Language A: English, Category 1**

How are the psychological and cultural effects of colonization portrayed in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Bradbury's *The Martian Chronicles*?

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## Abstract

My research is motivated by the following question: *How are the psychological and cultural effects of colonization portrayed in Achebe's Things Fall Apart and Bradbury's The Martian Chronicles?* I chose this question because I wanted to investigate how two authors from completely different backgrounds, and with motives just as varied, view this important historical issue. I focused on their portrayal of colonization's most deleterious effects – namely, psychological trauma and cultural atrophy.

I have always found history appealing, so I wanted to investigate a topic that was related to both history and literature. I found that colonization was often tackled in literature, so I began exploring how distinct the novels and authors were from each other, but also how they were similar in their views of how it affects people psychologically and culturally. I evaluated the themes the novels shared, and the motives the writers had, in order to comprehend their views and how they were reflected in their writing. I narrowed my research down to *Things Fall Apart* and *The Martian Chronicles* because I liked that both included similar portrayals of colonization through two very different genres.

This investigation of the two texts concludes that regardless of the writer, his background, his motives, and his chosen mode of expression, both reveal how colonization conquers the lands and minds of the oppressed. This research concludes that despite one novel being rooted in real African history, and the other being a science fiction compilation of short stories set on Mars, both authors state that colonization was just as damaging then as it is now, and perhaps as it will be in the future, and colonization in any place – even beyond this planet – cannot be portrayed as anything other than a heinous, unjust crime.

*Word Count: 291*

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How are the psychological and cultural effects of colonization portrayed in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Bradbury's *The Martian Chronicles*?

## I. Introduction

Colonization is a system that suppresses, impairs, and even kills individuals and cultures by subjugating groups of people. Colonization destroys lives by taking over lands, killing cultures gradually, and enforcing new laws and mores on the silenced and marginalized. In literature, it represents the epitome of injustice and oppression. Literature specifically is used as a means to speak out and express the suffering of the oppressed; it provides an outlet for those affected and for those who want to call attention to past injustices. The novel *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe focuses on European missionaries arriving in the protagonist's homeland, Nigeria, and their aggressive dissection of Nigerian culture under the false pretense of "saving" a society already complex and complete. Similarly, the compilation of short stories entitled *The Martian Chronicles* by Ray Bradbury is a science fiction illustration of colonialism set in the far future on Mars, where humans invade Mars even though it is rightfully populated by Martians. This investigation of *Things Fall Apart* and *The Martian Chronicles* will analyze the literary merit of the two authors using personal experience and satire to inform readers about the negative consequences of colonization.

In his popular novel, Achebe consults both his lived experience as a Nigerian and the history of his country to write a fictional tale, largely inspired by truth, about colonization's deleterious effects on past and present Nigeria. He shows the struggle that Nigerians endured against the missionaries, against themselves, and against accepting a completely new way of life imposed on them. In *The Martian Chronicles*, Bradbury uses the future prospect of space exploration – human expeditions on Mars, to be precise – as a metaphor for past colonial

conquests on Earth. The stories are set in the future, yet they are deeply rooted historically; the cultural clashes between the Earth Men and Martians mirror historical confrontations and satirize humanity's unfortunate tendency to conquer territory without considering the irrevocable damage it inflicts on people and places. Bradbury shares some similar views with Achebe as both view colonialism as a cruel, discriminative system, and their feelings toward it are clear through their writing; not only do they relate it to death and conflict, but they also reveal it has long-lasting effects on the cultural landscapes and memories of those oppressed. Science fiction does not admittedly pair well with African novels deeply steeped in reality, but both *Things Fall Apart* and *The Martian Chronicles* implement the same unflinchingly critical lens to call attention to the past, present, and even future consequences of colonization.

## II. Writers' Focus

The novel *Things Fall Apart* revolves around a man called Okonkwo, a respected warrior within his tribe and by other tribes in Nigeria. Okonkwo's life is appealing, and the reader learns about his daily struggles such as taking care of his family, battling other tribes, and his growing awareness of the tightening clutches of colonialism on his traditional culture. The narrator states that Okonkwo "was a very strong man and rarely felt fatigue. But his wives and children were not as strong, and so they suffered. But they dared not complain openly. Okonkwo's first son, Nwoye, was then twelve years old but was already causing his father great anxiety for his incipient laziness" (Achebe 10). Taking care of his family is just one of Okonkwo's issues, but it is a priority to Okonkwo, even as his life becomes increasingly difficult with the insidious presence of the missionaries. Achebe's narrator calls attention to the cultural disparity between the readers' society and that of the Ibo. For instance, he says of Okonkwo that "He was a man of action, a man of war [...] On great occasions such as the funeral of a village celebrity he drank his palm-wine from his first human head" (Achebe 8). This shows Okonkwo's values, and it is an attempt to cement a relationship between the reader and the protagonist so readers empathize with Okonkwo and his ritualistic, complex society.

However, *The Martian Chronicles* does not focus on a specific character as it is a collection of short stories that divulge the hardships of how two distant cultures, Earth Men and Martians, are forced to intertwine in the worst of ways. Bradbury instead focuses on portraying the similarities and differences between the two dissonant cultures. The short story "Ylla" is about an unhappy Martian wife, Ylla, who is neglected by her husband only to become the object of his jealousy when she dreams about Earth Men, thus prompting her husband to kill humans. Her husband, Yii, envious of the humans in Ylla's dream, says he is going "hunting" and

eventually kills an Earth Man (Bradbury 13). The despondent marriage, although somewhat extreme, is parallel to that of an unhappy human relationship, thus reminding readers that the oppressed are no different than their oppressors. Recognizing them as dangerous, Yii attacks a man he views as an invader of his land and his wife's subconscious. The relatively minimal threat the man poses shows the psychological trauma of colonization, as Yii struggles to explain why he wants to kill the man, but does so anyway. These subtle descriptions of daily life show victims of colonization to be dynamic, fully-realized characters – a welcome break from victims often consigned to static, one-dimensional portrayals in history texts.

Bradbury purposely directs attention to the calamity and struggle of the societies against each other and within themselves. After a fight breaks out between Martians and humans, the view of one character about past human life is revealed when he says:

They knew how to live with nature and get along with nature. They didn't try too hard to be all men and no animal. That's the mistake we made when Darwin showed up. We embraced him and Huxley and Freud, all smiles. And then we discovered that Darwin and our religions didn't mix. Or at least we didn't think they did. We were fools. We tried to budge Darwin and Huxley and Freud. They wouldn't move very well. So, like idiots, we tried knocking down religion. We succeeded pretty well. We lost our faith and went around wondering what life was for. If art was no more than a frustrated outflinging of desire, if religion was no more than self-delusion, what good was life? Faith had always given us an answer to all things. But it all went down the drain with Freud and Darwin. We were and still are lost people (Bradbury 86).

A human in the book, Tomas, criticizes mankind as a whole, questioning actions taken by people on Earth. He philosophizes on their past divisiveness and how it has caused an irrevocable rift. Tomas ruminates on the possibility that they will upset the Martian's delicate cultural balance if they proceed to impose their beliefs and way of life on Mars. Bradbury expresses his personal beliefs in this example, using Tom as a vehicle to suggest that societies not only destroy themselves from within, but plague other societies as well.

### III. Shared Themes and Metaphorical Significance

Achebe shows his personal view of colonization through a highly metaphorical description: “And at last the locusts did descend. They settled on every tree and on every blade of grass; they settled on the roofs and covered the bare ground. Mighty tree branches broke away under them, and the whole country became the brown-earth color of the vast, hungry swarm” (Achebe 40). The literal meaning of the quote is that grasshoppers are stopping to rest, but the sheer number of them overwhelms the landscape; of course, Achebe has a more figurative and profound meaning behind the grasshoppers, though. The grasshoppers that cover every single tree and swarm the country represent the colonizers and their arrival that shifts the country culturally. The author’s constant use of the phrase “they settled” is a metaphorical reference to colonizing. The weight of the grasshoppers depicts the power of the white men and the broken branches represent the traditions and culture of the people, in this case the Igbo society, that are damaged due to the presence of the “grasshoppers”. Surprisingly, Bradbury uses locusts to represent the colonizers as well. In the short story “The Locusts,” the narrator mentions how more and more humans are swarming Mars and destroying it: “The rockets came like locusts, swarming and settling in blooms of rosy smoke. And from the rockets ran men with hammers” (Bradbury 103). This human invasion is perceived as a plague on the Martian landscape and culture.

A character in *Things Fall Apart*, Obierika, laments “Does the white man understand our custom about land?” (Achebe 124). Okonkwo responds “How can he when he does not even speak our tongue? But he says that our customs are bad; and our own brothers who have taken up his religion also say that our customs are bad. How do you think we can fight when our own brothers have turned against us? The white man is very clever [...] He has put a knife on the

things that held us together and we have fallen apart” (Achebe 124). Here, Okonkwo’s frustration is clear as he ridicules how the white men are oblivious to Igbo life yet claim it is wrong and inferior. He says the missionaries bluntly disrespected the Igbo’s way of life through their self-righteous attempt to implant their religion on the tribe, all the while remaining completely ignorant to the Igbo’s cultural practices. Yet Okonkwo does not entirely point his finger at the white colonizers, but also the black tribe members who solemnly surrendered to the other side. Bradbury too shows the acceptance of some Martians to human culture, as some aliens start singing American songs when Humans first arrive, totally unaware of this subconscious cultural encroachment. Bradbury shows there are nonviolent ways to colonize people as well.

In *The Martian Chronicles*, the Martians set up a trap for the Third Expedition arriving from Earth, who think they are moving on to a far superior destination. The last surviving human from the expedition realizes what is happening when it is too late: “these Martians have made this seem like my old home town, my old house, to lull me out of my suspicions? What better way to fool a man, by his own emotions. And suppose those two people in the next room, asleep, are not my mother and father at all. But two Martians, incredibly brilliant, with the ability to keep me under this dreaming hypnosis all of the time?” (Bradbury 60). The Martians trick and slaughter all the humans from the expedition because they fear they will have their home taken away from them. In *Things Fall Apart*, on the way to Ikemefuna’s village, some men from Okonkwo’s tribe attack Ikemefuna. Seeking help, Ikemefuna runs to Okonkwo, but in order to not look feeble in front of his tribesman, he kills the boy. As the colonial clutches tighten on Nigerian society, tribesman is pitted against tribesman. Not only is the theme of dishonesty present in both texts, but the motive for it is the same as well, which is to protect something or

someone. In *The Martian Chronicles* it is used to secure their home, and in *Things Fall Apart* it is for the sake of Ikemefuna's safety – yet death is the end product of both. This displays the psychological view of colonialism by both writers, where they allude to the notion that with colonialism, death is bound to occur. The humans and Martians are against each other, and Okonkwo and his people are pitted against each other as the presence of the missionaries breaks down social barriers. By constantly relating it to death, both writers emphasize how ruinous colonization is.

Both texts also share a theme of encroachment. When the Earth Men arrive, they try to enforce their culture on the Martians, completely disregarding the Martians' way of life. In the short story "The Interim," humans build a town on Mars that resembles exactly how a town would look on Earth, showing the familiar historical trend of a group of people implementing their supposedly superior culture on another. A Martian rants about what the humans are doing to their home and how they are controlling his people. He says "They began by controlling books of cartoons and then detective books and, of course, films, one way or another, one group or another, political bias, religious prejudice, union pressure; there was always a minority afraid of something, and a great majority afraid of the dark, afraid of the future, afraid of the past, afraid of the present, afraid of themselves and shadows of themselves" (Bradbury 140). Even the tedious aspects of life are changed due to colonialism, as the humans choose what cartoons and books the Martians have access to, leaving no trace of the culture that existed there before – making it inevitable for them to either conform or die.

In *Things Fall Apart*, encroachment is introduced after Okonkwo moves to his mother's village, where European missionaries arrive in an attempt to convert the tribe members to Christians. Both authors share parallels about religion in their texts. The short stories "The

Settlers” and “The Shore” are about religious folks from Earth arriving on Mars and trying to spread their religion, assuming it is better than the Martians’ way of life. A human gets into an argument with a Martian and says “I have something to fight for and live for [...] what does your civilization offer?” (Bradbury 89). This is before an imminent attack, and once again the humans assume they are superior, even when they have some diplomacy with the Martians. When the human missionaries arrive, they mock the Martian civilization, even though it is already far more advanced than any human civilization. The colonizers always deem the society they take over as being backward and wrong, only because it is not like theirs. Bradbury is alluding to the unwelcome arrival of past European missionaries in different countries. In the beginning, the relationship between the missionaries and the village was healthy in *Things Fall Apart*, due to the missionaries’ leader Mr. Brown, who was fair and respectful of the Nigerian people. Things slowly become worse when he dies, and the missionaries grow strict and callous. They imprison and abuse some of the village men, causing tension between the two parties. In a similar situation, the strained relationship between the humans and the Martians deteriorates in *The Martian Chronicles* because neither is willing to accept one another; as a result, mutual slaughter between the opposing parties occurs. Moreover, in *Things Fall Apart*, Okonkwo’s inability to accept the new cultural standards set by the missionaries indicates the incompatibility of the two ways of life.

Agitated by all the change, Okonkwo kills a messenger sent from the missionaries. The district commissioner looks for Okonkwo to punish him, and he goes to his compound only to see that Okonkwo has hung himself after realizing the other tribe members had surrendered. Okonkwo’s suicide represents the psychological effects of colonization and what it does to an individual, as his death is sparked by the influence of the missionaries. The scene does not affect

the commissioner, and it instead excites him as he now has something interesting to write about in his book. In the very last lines of *Things Fall Apart*, the narrator gives the commissioner the last thought, stating “He had already chosen the title of the book, after much thought: The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger” (Achebe 209). This shows how little sympathy the oppressors feel towards the groups of people they oppress. Once again, readers are confronted with a harrowing truth – the oppressor gets the last word on the people he subjugates and silences, erasing them of their autonomy and voice. Not being able to accept the new culture forced upon him, Okonkwo takes his own life; he becomes deprived of his own beliefs, and being compelled to accept someone else’s triggers his suicide. He is not “pacified” – he is conquered, completely and utterly destroyed. Readers fortunately are given an earlier glimpse of a complex, complete society, but are ultimately reminded of what has happened to such a vibrant culture. Throughout the whole novel, the author criticizes colonization and reveals how the encroachment of Europeans was detrimental to the Nigerians.

Bradbury similarly shows how humans caused all the Martians to die and that their arrival is what brought an end to the Martians. The Martians perishing from a chickenpox outbreak has historical connections to the European invasion of North America. Bradbury shows the readers how colonization can silence and destroy a group of people forever, while unjustly and unfairly their oppressors are the ones who survive in the end. However, he employs his character Spender with more consciousness, as Spender laments the sad fate of the Martians – an ancient, noble civilization – being wiped out by something as innocuous as common human bacteria:

Chicken pox, God, chicken pox, think of it! A race builds itself for a million years, refines itself, erects cities like those out there, does everything it can to give itself respect and beauty, and then it dies. Part of it dies slowly, in its own time, before our age, with

dignity. But the rest! Does the rest of Mars die of a disease with a fine name or a terrifying name or a majestic name? No, in the name of all that's holy, it has to be chicken pox, a child's disease, a disease that doesn't even kill children on Earth! It's not right and it's not fair. It's like saying the Greeks died of mumps, or the proud Roman died on their beautiful hills of athlete's foot! If only we'd given the Martians time to arrange their death robes, lie down, look fit, and think up some other excuse for dying. It can't be a dirty, silly thing like chicken pox. It doesn't fit the architecture; it doesn't fit this entire world! (Bradbury 67).

Just the mere presence of humans on Mars upsets the delicate balance of life for the Martians. Achebe makes it clear that Okonkwo, although struggling with his own life, was perfectly content even though he broke religious rules and tribe principles; suicide was never an option for him yet the missionaries made it his only option. The missionaries tried to force their religion on the villagers, giving no regard to the beliefs they already had. This is not unlike how the Earth Men implemented their culture on the Martians, and then accidentally killed them with their bacteria. The appearance of the missionaries in Okonkwo's village causes the peaceful society to completely shift, and the imprisonment of the tribesmen causes uproar within the village and gives them no choice but to be savages.

#### IV. Authorial Intention

Achebe was Nigerian, and he sympathized with his ancestors and the struggle they endured. Nigeria is still suffering today as a postcolonial nation. Bradbury uses satire in his short stories to showcase how European colonization destroyed many cultures. Although it is set in a farfetched future, it is rooted in and based on historical events. The Martians represent Native Americans, and in *The Martian Chronicles* they all die out from being killed by force or chickenpox. In North America, the Native Americans died out from catching diseases such as smallpox off of the Europeans. Achebe's motivation to write the book was personal as he grew up in the aftermath of colonization. The book is fictional, but it is based on the very real demise that colonization brought to Nigeria. Achebe wanted to raise awareness about the prejudiced and tyrannical side of colonization. Having grown up in a continent that was and still is in some areas suffering from postcolonial trauma, he used literature as a weapon to speak out and inform the masses. Both explore the negative effects of colonization, but they each present it differently. Throughout his novel, Achebe makes sure that readers cement a relationship with the protagonist so they empathize with him, especially when it becomes apparent that colonization ultimately triggers Okonkwo's death. Bradbury's portrayal of colonization is smeared with bloodshed, as heavy carnage in the human and Martian populations is shown in several of the short stories. Making death seem like the only byproduct of colonization, the authors make readers resent the concept of it.

## V. Conclusion

Therefore, both Achebe and Bradbury blame colonization for the demise of a culture, Bradbury with the Native Americans and Achebe with Nigerian tribal life. *The Martian Chronicles* and *Things Fall Apart* are similar in many aspects, but are also quite distinct from each other. The way the authors choose to present their message is in contrast with each other, as Achebe sets his story in unindustrialized Africa, while Bradbury's is located in outer space in the far future through a satirical science fiction lens. Achebe has a personal attachment towards his subject, as he lived in a country still reeling from the aftershocks of colonization, and he sympathizes with the suffering that his ancestors endured whilst their culture disintegrated. Bradbury's motives are not personal but didactic, and he seeks to criticize colonial practices by showing that the results are just as heinous in a different time and place. Both authors shamelessly and unapologetically highlight the past, present, and future consequences of colonization.

*Word Count: 3511*

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