



Social Fragmentation in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and *Head's Maru*: A Comparative Study

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Abstract

*This qualitative research sought to do a comparative analysis of social fragmentation in *Things Fall Apart* and *Maru*. Textual analysis was employed to analyse, interpret and evaluate the two novels in the light of postcolonial criticism, focusing on otherness. The researchers engaged the texts in multiple readings to gain a descriptive understanding of them and take descriptive notes at every stage of reading. Excerpts were purposefully sampled from the novels and analysed thematically. The study revealed that in pre-colonial Africa, social fragmentation resulted from classism, patriarchy and bad tradition; hence, the society operates in a binary relationship. In colonial Africa, social fragmentation resulted from religion and racism. However, post-colonial Africa experienced the deepest form of social fragmentation; spiced by tribalism and other pre-colonial factors. The study concluded that both novels confirm the concept of 'otherness'. So, future research can focus on emotional and structural fragmentations.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Fragmentation is a crucial narrative concept usually employed by modern, postmodern, and postcolonial writers. Hence, Deffner and Hoerning (2011, 2) opined that “[...] fragmentation is not a new term — it appears together with conceptualisations of pluralization and differentiation of modern societies long before it experienced a renaissance within theorisations of late, radical or reflexive modernity and post-modernities”. Contemporary studies on fragmentation reveal that the concept can manifest stylistically, formally, or thematically in both modern and postmodern literary works (e.g., Chaudhary & Sharma, 2011; Farley, 2018).

Morguson (2012) also argues that fragmentation is a common concept in postcolonial literature, and it manifests in the form of a binary relationship: the white Westerner (the colonizer) against the “other” (the colonized). This research sought to investigate whether or not, fragmentation also exists in postcolonial African literature written in the English language.

In doing this, one needs to begin from the African classics since they set the standard in African literature, hence the choice of *Things Fall Apart* and *Maru* for the present study.

Previous studies such as Farley (2018), Khamis (2003) and Suwalska-Kolecka (2009) revealed that fragmentation can manifest in narrative elements: plots, characters, themes, images, and the narrative form. African classics like *Things Fall Apart* and *Maru* also contain all these elements; hence, a comparative analysis of fragmentation in these African classics will help to better explain how it manifests in African literature written in English. For the sake of this study, fragmentation is used to mean division, antagonism or opposition.

Both *Things Fall Apart* and *Maru* are artistically outstanding: they present very important and sensitive issues of African reality. In the framework of historical setups before, during, and after colonisation portrayed in the novels *Things Fall Apart* and *Maru*, Achebe and Head jointly demonstrate that fragmentation is one of the basic issues dominating African society and affecting individuals. Therefore, the present researchers have carried out a comparative study of social fragmentation in both novels. The study has provided a parallel analysis of the two societies presented by the authors in both novels as regards the occurrence of social fragmentation.

Many Critics have examined fragmentation in literary texts (e.g., Harrington, 1992; Karlsson, 2007; Morguson, 2012; Bhardwaj, 2014; Khamis, 2003; Zumakpeh, 1992). However, earlier research on Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Head's *Maru* had focused on different issues other than the issue of social fragmentation. On *Things Fall Apart*, examples of issues studied by earlier researchers include proverbs usage as a literary device (Alimi 2012), the downfall of traditionalism (Fagrutheen, 2014), cultural identity loss (Insuwan, 2012), pre- and post-colonial Igbo society (Kenalemang, 2013). Concerning Head's *Maru*, issues like mysticism and madness, African identity, identity and literary commitment have been largely discussed by Gboyega (2013); Mahasha (2014); Odhiambo et al (2013) respectively.

Obviously, although the literary texts selected by previous researchers for the study of fragmentation cut across all the three genres of literature (i.e., prose, drama, and poetry), very few of the previous researchers have done a comparative study (e.g., Morguson, 2012). These gaps in the existing literature thus informed the present study: a comparative study of social fragmentation in *Things Fall Apart* and *Maru*.

In order to fulfil the study's goals, the research is guided by the following underlying assumptions:

1. Social fragmentation occurs in the two novels under investigation.
2. Both novels jointly confirm the claims of postcolonial theory, especially the concept of 'otherness'.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Social fragmentation, as a type of fragmentation, has received a lot of critical attention from different scholars. For instance, using the bibliographic review method, Garay et al (2022) examined societal disintegration and the effect it has on inclusive education. Their study revealed that "social fragmentation is a problem that afflicts today's society since it brings with

it the formation of different social groups, which will be distinguished by the type of economic, social level and job position they hold” (p. 1720). Garay et al argued that “social fragmentation occurs through a group of people separated from society” (p. 1720). They maintained that “social fragmentation is a division in society, which can be seen from many angles, including economic, educational, political, religious and ethnic” (p. 1727). The study concluded that communal disintegration has resulted in public discrimination, dishonesty and other psychosocial issues. Societal fragmentation originates from the marginalisation of economically disadvantaged groups, creating rivalry between social groups within the society.

Yoshioka et al (2022) also used the Bayesian hierarchical model to examine the relationship between communal disintegration, socioeconomic disadvantage, and the likelihood of suicide in various municipalities throughout Japan. According to them, “suicide risk increases with a high level of social fragmentation” (p. 8). They explained social fragmentation as the degree of disconnection and isolation within social networks. One conclusion drawn by Yoshioka et al (2022) was that social fragmentation and socioeconomic deprivation are key factors that contribute to suicide risk. Therefore, “social fragmentation requires appropriate social policy attention” (p. 8).

Similarly, Jeong and Seol (2022) presented a theoretical framework for understanding the complex dynamics of social fragmentation. They described the phenomenon as a situation “where personal and impersonal social relationships among people are shattered... a society divided into small pieces” (p.102). The study focused on practical strategies for addressing social fragmentation. According to the authors, a fragmented society is “a society where social fragmentation is so severe that integration is almost impossible.” (p. 97). Jeong and Seol identified the negative features of social fragmentation as “separation, segmentation, alienation and conflicts” (p. 99). They argued that social fragmentation is a major challenge faced by contemporary societies, and it “increases social isolation, identity crisis, and social conflicts in interpersonal relationships” (p. 97). They maintained that the phenomenon has a wide range of negative consequences, such as social conflict, political polarisation, and economic inequality. Jeong and Seol concluded that when a society is full of “domination, discrimination, exclusion, and neglect, it may facilitate social conflicts” (p. 101).

Likewise, Minh Pham et al (2020) used a computational model to explore the relationship between social balance and social fragmentation in a complex social network. According to them, social fragmentation describes the tendency for social groups to become separated and disconnected from each other. The study revealed that when the social balance is high, social fragmentation is reduced, but when the social balance is low, social fragmentation is increased. Minh Pham et al (2020) argued that these findings have important implications for understanding the factors that contribute to social cohesion and social conflict. The authors concluded that social balance is an important factor in promoting social cohesion and reducing social conflict.

3. METHODOLOGY

The research conducted falls under qualitative inquiry (Creswell, 2013), employing a postcolonial literary criticism approach. Postcolonial criticism centres on literature produced by individuals who were colonised, to express their identity and reclaim their historical

narrative in response to the expected portrayal of their culture as 'other'. Thus, Harding and Parsons (2011, p. 1) argued that:

Postcolonial criticism calls for justice and seeks to speak to social and psychological suffering, exploitation, violence and enslavement done to the powerless victims of colonization around the world by challenging the superiority of dominant perspectives and seeking to re-position and empower the marginalized and subordinated.

In the present study, postcolonial criticism was employed to investigate how the 'binary relationship' of 'otherness' as suggested by Bhabha (1994) contributes to the occurrence of social fragmentation in the novels under examination. Bhabha's notion of 'otherness' was utilised as a framework to facilitate the examination, analysis, assessment, and interpretation of the information and concepts within the aforementioned novels by Achebe and Head. 'Otherness' forms the primary ideology on which this study is grounded. The concept as conceived by Homi Bhabha, was used by the researcher to investigate the scope of social fragmentation in the novels under study. Conclusions were then drawn about the occurrence of social fragmentation in the two novels.

Bhabha (1994, p. 296) said, "Colonial discourse depends on the ideological construction of otherness." He additionally suggested that it leads to the formation of stereotypes: "The stereotype is dangerous not because it mischaracterises the 'other' but because it assumes a totalized fixity of the image" (p. 162). That is why Morguson (2012, p. 2) opined that "postcolonial criticism identifies a binary relationship: the white Westerner (the coloniser) against the 'other' (the colonised)". Consequently, the world becomes divided into distinct categories of "they," "us," and "the other" (McLeod, 2008, p. 1), accomplished through the process of categorisation that assigns individuals to various social groups. This phenomenon, as described by McLeod (2008, p. 1), is referred to as discrimination between the "in-group" (us) and the "out-group" (them). Given (2008, p. 491) explained that this discrimination is "based on a variety of characteristics such as religion, social class, ethnicity, visible racial characteristics, gender, age, and sexual orientation" as we rightly see in *Things Fall Apart* and *Maru*.

The data collection tool employed in the research was textual material. Ofori-Birikorang (2017) viewed a text as something open to interpretation. Texts are interpreted to understand how individuals in specific cultures and eras assign significance to their surroundings. That is why Belsey (2013, p. 164) asserted that "the text ... reproduces or reiterates meanings, which always come from outside, and are not at the artist's disposal, any more than they are at ours".

The chosen research design for this study is textual analysis. According to Mahasha (2014, p. 17), textual analysis involves examining, interpreting, and assessing literary works. In essence, textual examination revolves around comprehending the content presented in a text. This is achieved by considering the interpretation process as a result of the interaction between a reader and a text (Belsey, 2013).

Belsey defines textual analysis as a meticulous examination of cultural artefacts incorporating the post-structural concept of signifiers and signifieds. Arya (2020, p. 1) clarifies that it is a qualitative analysis that explores the underlying ideological and cultural assumptions within a text. Thus, it serves as a research methodology for understanding diverse cultural interpretations of identity and worldview (McKee, 2003).

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Social fragmentation is a dominant occurrence in both the Igbo society and the Batswana society (as presented in both novels). These two societies serve as the macro settings of the novels under study. These societies are fragmented in terms of social class/status, geographical demarcations, gender, customs and traditions, religion, race/colour, tribe, residence et cetera. Yet, it may be argued that in his novel, Achebe skilfully reconstructs an authentic portrayal of the customary Igbo lifestyle in *Things Fall Apart*.

Essentially, the novel vividly captures the splendour, philosophy, and poetic essence of Igbo culture. The novel skillfully presents various elements such as the gripping spectacle of wrestling, the art of oral tradition through proverbs, and the rich rituals surrounding harvest, marriage, and death. However, this pre-colonial Igbo society also exhibits certain weaknesses that create divisions rather than unity. One such weakness is the presence of social class within the Igbo community, leading to fragmentation and differing social and political positions among its various groups, despite the absence of a traditional monarchy.

In Umuofia, a 'title' serves as a symbol of elevated social standing. Individuals who exhibit the highest levels of masculinity and possess significant material wealth are likely to attain numerous titles within the community. Having multiple titles garners greater respect and provides advantages over others. Conversely, those who struggle to meet their needs or exhibit more feminine traits receive little sympathy and patience from the Igbo society. Essentially, individuals with titles lead prosperous lives and are afforded high respect and preferential treatment as members of the esteemed noble class in pre-colonial Igbo society.

In Umuofia, the elders, known as *ndichie*, hold a significant position in society. While age is respected, it is one's achievements that are truly revered. Due to their perceived wisdom and experience, the community entrusts these elders, who are wealthy, brave, and hold titles, with the responsibility of handling daily affairs, organising events, and assisting the oracles in enforcing laws. Politically, the elders possess a considerable amount of power and actively participate in clan matters. For example, when presented with Okonkwo's report about his mission to Mbaino, the elders decide that a girl should be offered as a sacrifice to Ogbuefi Udo to replace his slain wife, while the boy, Ikemefuna, is to live with Okonkwo.

The *egwugwu*, also known as ancestral spirits, comprise a distinct group within the community. They wear masks and serve as the administrators of justice and leaders in religious rituals. The *egwugwu* share characteristics with both the titled individuals and the elders. In other words, an individual can hold the status of both a titled member and an elder while also embodying the role of an *egwugwu*. Achebe illustrates this concept by depicting Okonkwo assuming the role of an *egwugwu*:

Okonkwo's wives, and perhaps other women as well, might have noticed that the second *egwugwu* had springly walk of Okonkwo. And they might also have noticed that Okonkwo was not among the titled men and elders who sat behind the row of *egwugwu*. (p. 72)

So, the *egwugwu*, along with titled individuals and elders, are subject to authority of the oracles. They collaborate with the oracles to enforce the laws of the Igbo community. Together, they play a crucial role in upholding and implementing the societal regulations.

The Igbo society presents itself as open and democratic, valuing an individual's worth rather than their paternal lineage. This is evident in the acceptance and understanding extended to Okonkwo, who is judged based on his own abilities and merits rather than his family background. It suggests that equal opportunities exist within the Igbo community, where hard work and success in yam production can lead to respect, titles, and even leadership positions. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that not all members of the Igbo community enjoy these privileges.

First of all, the hierarchical structure of the Igbo society places women at the lowest position. The society's fragmentation is evident even in its oral traditions, where a binary relationship exists: masculinity against femininity or the ruling class against the oppressed 'other'. For instance, some stories/folktales are branded as masculine while others are described as feminine as shown below:

So Okonkwo encouraged the boys to sit with him in his obi, and he told them stories of the land — masculine stories of violence and bloodshed. Nwoye knew that it was right to be masculine and to be violent, but somehow he still preferred the stories that his mother used to tell, and which she no doubt still told her younger children — stories of the tortoise and his wily ways, and of the birds[...]. That was the kind of story Nwoye loved. But he knew that they were for foolish women and children, he knew his father wanted him to be a man. (pp. 42-43)

Indeed, the Igbo society is characterised by fragmentation caused by pervasive patriarchal stereotypes. Men have the opportunity to acquire titles, accumulate wealth, and attain social status, thereby becoming the privileged elite. On the other hand, despite their hard work, women are relegated to the lowest rung of society. For example, Achebe writes that Okonkwo's "mother and sisters worked hard enough, but they grew women's crops, like cocoyams, beans and cassava. Yam, the king of crops, was a man's crop" (p.18). This presupposes that the cultivation of yam is a prerogative/reserve for men. A woman can only grow crops like cocoyam, beans and cassava, and despite her industry to grow these crops on a large scale, she remains nothing more than one of the material possessions of her husband to earn him a title and reputable position. She is regarded as the 'other' and cannot gain any title of her own in this patriarchal Igbo community.

Clearly, the Igbo community strives to maintain a balance between male and female values, as yam is revered as king while acknowledging the saying, "Mother is Supreme" (p. 130). However, in reality, women face abuse and humiliation, and their existence is taken for granted in Umuofia society. For instance, Okonkwo's punishment stems from disturbing the

earth goddess, Ani, rather than nearly killing his wife. Igbo society's value judgements are based on a male-female dichotomy where male is perceived as good and female as evil. Insulting a man by calling him "a woman" (p. 21) is a common practice. Women are treated as commodities or possessions within their male-dominated communities, exemplified by comments such as "He had a large barn full of yams and he had three wives" (pp. 5-6). Stratton (1994, p. 25) further argues that:

Women are also systematically excluded from the political, economic, the judicial, and even the discursal life of the community. This is indicated [...] through the composition of the governing council of elders, the *ndichie*, or the membership of the powerful *egwugwu* cult, which is in both cases, all male.

Similarly, although children also constitute a major group in the Igbo society, they are not recognised by the society; hence, they have the same low status as women. They are equally vulnerable, and can be sacrificed to the gods at will by the upper class as in the case of *Ikemefuna*.

In Igboland, women and children hold a low social status, but there are others who are even worse off – the 'classless' individuals. These outcasts, known as *osu*, face discrimination similar to women and children. They are completely rejected by society and excluded from regular community life. The novel depicts the difficult situation faced by an *osu*:

[He is] dedicated to a god, a thing set apart — a taboo forever, and his children after him. He could neither marry nor be married by the free-born. He was in fact an outcast, living in a special area of the village, close to the Great Shrine... An *osu* could not attend an assembly of the free-born, and they, in turn, could not shelter under his roof. He could not take any of the four titles of the clan, and when he died he was buried by his kind in the Evil Forest. (pp. 125-126)

Therefore, individuals classified as *osu* in the Igbo society are devoid of any standing or status. Regardless of their agricultural achievements or wealth, their attempts to elevate their position within society are futile. They are treated as outsiders or strangers within their own community.

Similarly, there exist *efulefu* in the Igbo society; men who are deemed worthless or unsuccessful, impoverished and lacking courage. Their social standing resembles that of women, yet unlike women, they have a chance to attain status within their community. Achebe does not explicitly clarify in the novel the reasons behind the oppression and marginalisation of women, children, *osu* and *efulefu* within their society.

Apparently, Achebe portrays the presence of injustice within the Igbo society. While the society emphasises the importance of material accomplishments and hard work, extolling the significance of yam as the ultimate measure of success, it disregards the rights of certain groups: women, children, *osu*, and *efulefu*. These marginalised individuals are denied the opportunity to strive for a better life. This social injustice leads to fragmentation within the Igbo society, breeding conflicts between the ruling class and the oppressed 'other' — the *osu*, *efulefu*, women and children.

In brief, women, *efulefu* (unsuccessful men), the *osu* and children/twins suffer undue injustice and oppression from the ruling class in the Igbo society. All these groups of people are cut off from having a say in the affairs of their own community. These are obvious footprints of patriarchy, classism and bad tradition which turn to divide the Igbo society rather than unite it within the pre-colonial set-up.

Actually, change is inevitable within the Igbo community due to inherent contradictions and conflicts among its social groups. The arrival of the white missionaries and Europeans serves as a catalyst for change, as it exposes the dormant conflict between the ruling class and the oppressed groups. The marginalised individuals, including the *osu*, *efulefu*, children, and women, seize the opportunity provided by Christianity to challenge the ruling class and strive for their rights.

As previously noted, the *osu* are rejected and marginalised within their own society, labeled as outcasts. Consequently, a portion of this group, along with certain women, embrace Christianity and become passionate followers of the new religion. As a result, they naturally start to question and challenge the authority and dominance of the clan that denies them their rightful status. It is therefore not surprising to see Enoch challenge the authority of the ruling class by committing “one of the greatest crimes a man could commit [—] to unmask an *egwugwu* in the public” (p.148). In other words, he “killed an ancestral spirit” (p. 149). Consequently, the entire community “was thrown into confusion” (p. 149).

Essentially, the leaders of the Igbo community seem oblivious to the internal conflict; instead, focusing on external factors. In response to Enoch's actions, which spark a crisis, the clan seeks severe revenge by destroying Enoch's compound and the church established by Mr. Brown. This leads to the arrest and humiliation of the six elders and the tragic fate of Okonkwo. For the leaders and titled men who have benefited greatly from the community, things have undoubtedly fallen apart. However, for women, children, *osu*, and *efulefu*, their circumstances come together in a new way. Ironically, with the intervention of Europeans, they have the opportunity to leave a society where their social status is practically non-existent and embrace a new faith that offers unconditional recognition and acceptance.

In pre-colonial Igbo society, as portrayed in *Things Fall Apart*, there is a significant fragmentation. The social structure is shaped by religious orientations, with priests holding power as the ruling class. Personal achievements, like wealth and bravery in wars, determine status and membership in the titled society. Social outcasts exist at the bottom, lacking recognition. The arrival of Europeans disrupts this structure, becoming the major concern as they exert influence morally, politically, and economically.

Thus, as explained by Fagrutheen (2014), “because of internal weaknesses within the native structure and the divided nature of Igbo society, the community of Umuofia [...] is unable to withstand the tidal wave of foreign religion, commerce, technology and government” (p. 26-27). In the pre-colonial Igbo society, unsuccessful men, women, and the outcasts have no respect; hence, they have no say in the affairs of the community. They suffer different kinds of prejudice and oppression. Consequently, when the European arrives in the Igboland, they are the people who readily join forces with him to collapse the stereotypical and biased structures of the pre-colonial Igbo society; to get back at their oppressors (i.e., the so-called titled men

considered as the ruling class or elites of the Igbo society) who treat them as the ‘other’ through prejudice and oppression. Therefore, to corroborate the views of Garay et al (2022) social fragmentation is a problem that affects the Igbo society.

In *Maru*, Head also explores communal prejudice and discrimination against the Bushmen in colonial and post-colonial Botswana. The protagonist, Margaret, rises above her difficult circumstances as a Coloured South African and her dehumanising experiences in Botswana. The novel reflects on Margaret’s background, paralleling it with South Africa’s oppressive past. These problems of colour, race, class, and ethnicity fragment Botswana society rather than uniting it, as depicted in *Maru*.

In the first chapter of the novel, Head vividly illustrates the perception of the Bushmen by other tribes in Botswana and different human races. They are regarded as the ‘other’ and dehumanised to the extent that they are equated with wild animals. Comparing the Bushmen to animals strips them of fundamental human qualities. In fact, of “all things that are said of oppressed people, worst things are said and done to the Bushmen” (p. 6) in the Botswana society. The Basarwa are considered by other tribes and races as “an oddity of the human race, who are half the head of a man and half the body of a donkey” (p. 6). Hence, the Basarwa are the oppressed “other” in the Botswana society. In both colonial and post-colonial Botswana society, the Masarwa tribe, which Margaret epitomizes, is shown strong disdain by other Botswana tribes to the extent that they are referred to as ‘Bushman’ or ‘Masarwa’, “the equivalent of ‘nigger’, a term of contempt which means, obliquely, a low, filthy nation” (p. 6).

Moreover, Head portrays the deepening prejudice against the Masarwa people through Dikeledi’s refusal to say their name and her encouragement for Margaret to distance herself from the tribe. This prejudice stems from the fact that powerful chiefs in Dilepe village owned numerous Masarwa slaves. Margaret, however, proudly identifies herself as Masarwa to both her friend and the school principal, demonstrating her determination to embrace her identity and assert control over her own mind and personality.

Margaret serves as a symbol of the discrimination faced by the Masarwa tribe, highlighting tribal prejudice, patriarchy, and classism. Through her experiences, the author portrays the horrifying effects of prejudice and oppression. Pete, the school principal, expresses his frustration and confusion about the situation to the education supervisor, Seth:

There’s a real mystery about that one at the school [...]. They don’t look you in the face and say, “I am a Masarwa.” It was like a slap in the face. The statement was so final, as though she did not want to be anything else. I had given her a loophole. Coloureds are just trash, but at least she could pass as one. It would have saved us an awful lot of bother. (p. 33)

The novel consistently emphasises the harmful nature of racism and tribal prejudice, regardless of the individuals involved. It underscores the universal evil of such discrimination, regardless of the perpetrators.

How universal was the language of oppression! They had said of the Masarwa what every white man had said of every black man: ‘They can’t think of themselves.

They don't know anything.' The matter never rested there. The strong man caught hold of the weaker man and a circus animal out of him, reducing him to the state of misery and subjection and non-humanity [...]. The Batswana thought they were safer than the white man. He had already awoken to the fact that the mistreated people are also furious people who could tear him to shreds. (p. 88)

As Head confronts the discrimination faced by the Bushmen in Botswana, she recognises that biased attitudes exist not only in her past in South Africa but also in the country she seeks to embrace. The intolerant society of Dilepe village objectifies Margaret when her Masarwa identity is revealed, and the education administrators exploit her perceived low status and gender to try to remove her from the school: "She can be shoved out [...]. It's easy. She's a woman" (p. 31).

This also brings to fore, the patriarchal nature of the Botswana society as well. Men dominate society and women are exploited sexually and pushed to the bottom. That is why women become 'sex machines' for men like Maru and Moleka to exploit and abandon without being remorseful. In fact, these two men "were notorious in Dilepe village" (p. 25) for their sexual exploitation of women:

At the end of a love affair, Moleka would smile in the way he smiled when he made people and goats jump out of his path, outrage in their eyes. There was nothing Moleka did not know about the female anatomy. It made him arrogant and violent [...] he outraged them, and horrible sensations were associated with the name of Moleka. Moleka and women were like a volcanic explosion in a dark tunnel. Moleka was the only one to emerge, on each occasion, unhurt, smiling. (pp. 25-26)

Hence, Margaret does not suffer prejudice only because of her low status as a Masarwa but also because of her femininity. In other words, the Botswana society is deeply fragmented, and this occurs in a binary relationship: the dominant masculinity against the minority feminine 'other'. It is therefore not surprising for Moleka to make a derogatory remark about Dikeledi, his future wife. He says to her: "You think men don't know what you mean when you walk around swinging your thighs like that? [...]. Women like you are the cause of all the trouble in the world" (p. 65). In addition, although Dikeledi is "the daughter of a paramount chief" (p. 17) and has "the best education" (p. 17), she has no opportunity to become the principal of Leseding School until the old patriarchal and stereotypical structure established by Pete and Seth has been pulled down.

Sincerely, Head's novel, *Maru*, portrays a deep social fragmentation where the Bushmen are marginalised and deemed uneducable according to Botswana culture. Despite Margaret's exceptional qualifications and talent, she faces discrimination and ridicule due to her tribal identity. The dominant ethnic groups in Botswana consider the Bushmen as the social 'other,' denying them respect and a place in society.

Interestingly, Margaret, despite the challenging circumstances she faces, becomes a symbol of transformation and a voice for the marginalised Masarwa tribe. Through her character, Head exposes the damaging effects of classism, patriarchy, and racial/tribal prejudice, while challenging the arrogance of dominant ethnic groups. Margaret, portrayed as

a victim, emerges as a redeemer for her tribe, possessing the ability to articulate their plight and offer a new perspective to a world divided by prejudice and extremism.

Margaret's journey is focused on understanding the survival of the marginalised Bushmen under the dominance of the ruling Batswana. Tribal prejudice shapes her experiences both at school and in the village, where the chiefs own numerous Masarwa as slaves. Margaret faces constant reminders of her low social status due to her tribal identity, which leads to controversy and division in the community as she becomes a teacher in Dilepe village.

Besides, social class is one of the issues that dominate and divide the Dilepe community. This society has been structured in "a social order" (p. 53) and "the same things were happening. There was a mass of people with no humanity to whom another mass referred: Why, they are naturally like that. They like to live in such filth. They have been doing it for centuries" (p. 53). In Dilepe, there are various social groups, and one of these groups comprises people of royalty, known as the 'Totems'. It is a privileged and respectable social class, and people like Maru, Morafi, Dikeledi and Moleka for instance, belong to this noble class. There is also a group of people called the social elites (such as Pete and Seth) who hold leadership positions in Dilepe's educational set-up. Thoughtless Totems like Morafi consider this group "as the height of the intellectual hemisphere" (p. 33); so, they are the people with whom Morafi discusses "important issues of the day" (p. 33). These two groups of people (i.e., the nobles and social elites) form the ruling class of Dilepe community.

Meanwhile, we also have women who are usually exploited sexually by men like Maru and Moleka. The fact is that women are regarded unimportant in Dilepe community. For example, although the Dilepe community does not confer basic humanity on Masarwa slaves, Dikeledi (a female Totem) is never confronted by the public when she defies all odds to ensure that the two slaves she inherits from her father are paid "a regular monthly wage [...], dressed well, ate well and walked about the village with a quiet air of dignity" (p. 17). But when Moleka (a male Totem) "[...] took up his fork and placed a mouthful of food in the mouth of a Masarwa, then with the same fork fed himself" (p. 40), the whole Dilepe community is immediately thrown into chaos: "People are angered by the behaviour of Moleka. They say his action was too high-handed and has created confusion" (p. 41). His action is judged as "high-handed" because men are more important than women and expected to know better in this patriarchal society. They are the lords of the land and are not expected to defy the norms of the society. Dikeledi's action however could be interpreted as a kind of assertion on behalf of these women; to register their displeasure about patriarchy and oppression of the deprived.

Besides, even though children also form a main class in Dilepe, nothing positive has been said about them. Their social status is as low as that of women. Yet, they are the ones used by self-centred adults (like Pete) to carry out evil schemes against the Bushmen. Worst of all; as Head puts it, children emulate this bad conduct from their parents: "Their parents spat on the ground as a member of a filthy, low nation passed by. Children went a little further. They spat on you. They pinched you. They danced a wild jiggle, with the tin cans rattling: 'Bushman! Low Breed! Bastard!'" (p. 5).

Although the social status of women and children in the Dilepe community is low, their situation is better because at least, they are fortunate to be accorded basic humanity. But down

the bottom of this social order, there is a group of people known as the Bushmen. They belong to the Masarwa tribe and are often subjected to slavery and oppression by the ruling class. They are the oppressed social 'other' or the ruled/voiceless class of the Botswana society. They are often used as slaves because their humanity is highly contested by other Botswana tribes. For instance, people like Maru, Dikeledi, Moleka and many other Totems own the Masarwa as slaves. The Masarwa slaves are completely denied humanity and regarded as one of the numerous material possessions of the aristocrats. They are cheaply turned into material assets and bequeathed to children of these aristocrats in the Dilepe community. So, Morafi for instance, "had had his father's mansion and slaves to himself" (p. 33) and Dikeledi "[...] had taken two slaves from her father's house" (p. 17).

In short, the level of injustice suffered by the Bushmen in Botswana; as recounted in *Maru*, has made them strangers in or alienated them from their own society. They are regarded as the social 'other' of the Botswana society that must be relegated to the margin. Hence, the Basarwa are completely denied basic humanity, reduced to public outcasts, and cut off from the rest of society.

In fact, the level of fragmentation in the Dilepe society is so deep that it reflects in their residential arrangements as well: "A long stretch of field separated the exclusive area where the top-class civil servants like Seth lived, and the rambling village arrangement of mud huts where Pete lived" (p. 72). This is a clear issue of Apartheid South Africa that Head incorporates in her narrative; to show that, the kind of prejudice she now witnesses in Botswana is not different from what she has experienced in Apartheid South Africa: the privileged/white men are separated from the less privileged/blacks by means of residence.

Even among the domestic animals in Dilepe (e.g., goats), some are more privileged than the others:

The summer was over and every shred of grass had disappeared from the ground. From a miller in the village, Dikeledi had purchased a bag of husks for Sheba, [a goat] and her baby and they continued to swell with fat and happiness while other village goats were reduced to lean skeletons, eating bits of dried, wind-blown paper in their desperation [...]. They were indeed becoming very superior goats. The Windscreen-wiper had learned the ways of civilized human behaviour [...]. (p. 90)

This implies that social status/classism and prejudice, which have fragmented the Dilepe society, go beyond human limits. They have been extended to even animals; such that there is no distinction between a privileged human and a privileged animal: they all feel superior to the rest of their kinds, considered to be the social 'other' (i.e., the less privileged human and animal). This is a strong assertion from Head to indicate that those tribes or races which consider other tribes/races as not different from animals and deny them basic humanity are themselves, not different from animals; "because decent people cannot behave that way" (p. 12). No doubt, the childhood friendly relationship between Moleka and Maru suddenly turns violent, and Moleka even contemplates murder. Example, he said to Maru, "I'm going to murder you" (p. 46), and actually, "Moleka stood outside, in the dark night, all kinds of murderous thoughts rushing through his mind" (p. 63).

5. CONCLUSION

Some conclusions have been drawn from this study. The study concludes that both *Things Fall Apart* and *Maru* support the assertions of postcolonial theory, particularly regarding the concept of ‘otherness’ as proposed by Bhabha. Additionally, the study affirms the perspective of Farley (2018) that fragmentation, as a literary device, highlights the breakdown of reality and challenges notions of totality. Moreover, the findings support the argument put forward by Given (2008) that social fragmentation arises from various factors, including religion, social class, ethnicity, race, gender, age, and sexual orientation.

Also, the occurrence of fragmentation in *Things Fall Apart* and *Maru* has both positive and negative implications. For instance, in *Things Fall Apart*, although the death of Okonkwo results from his own fragmentation and that of the society, it equally helps to prevent more bloodshed and deaths. Similarly, in *Maru*, Maru’s brave decision to marry Margaret makes him lose all his privileges and legacy as the future king of his society. But it has also helped to extend liberty to all the Basarwa people and gives them the courage to assert their humanity – as people who are free from slavery, oppression and suffering thereafter.

Moreover, the African society is bound for change, and those who remain adamant and refuse to accept this change like Okonkwo (in *Things Fall Apart*), Morafi, Seth and Pete (all in *Maru*) will suffer great humiliation and destruction.

Besides, we cannot blame the collapse of the African traditionalism, societal disintegration and eventual failure on the white colonists. Africans are responsible for their own woes because the African society operates a binary relationship; spiced by such stereotypical apparatuses as prejudice, individuality and tribalism. These are the foundations upon which the white men stand to deepen the fragmentation of the African society. Africa can only be transformed into a united society if these banal structures are dismantled. And for Africa to unite and develop as a continent, our leaders must exhibit great love and sacrifice for humanity; coupled with positive assertion from the oppressed, to remove prejudicial culture from the African society.

So, both Achebe and Head propose that transformative societal change in Africa requires dismantling prejudice, individuality, and tribalism, which oppress and alienate marginalised groups like women, children, *osu*, *efulefu*, and the Bushmen. Galloway (2001) suggests three stages: birth, death, and rebirth – for developing a unified society. Prejudice arises from ingrained notions, and for a new society to emerge, this prejudicial culture must perish. Leaders like Obierika, Ugbuefi Ugonna, and Maru should courageously challenge the existing norms in their communities.

Finally, it is apparent that Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* and Head’s *Maru* have been successfully analysed in this study through postcolonial criticism; specifically, Bhabha’s concept of ‘otherness’ as not much comparative work had been done through careful theoretical analysis of them from the postcolonial perspective.

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