

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background

*Things Fall Apart* is a novel written by Chinua Achebe and was published in 1958. In short, the novel depicts the life of the Igbo leader and a local wrestling champion named Okonkwo who rules a tribal society, a fictional village in Nigeria called Umuofia. The story revolves around his family with some explanations about his past, the tribal customs of the Igbo, as well as the impacts of Christian missionaries and European colonialism on the tribal people are depicted in the novel, in which the colonialism and Christianity begin to be parts of the village and replace the face and the nature of their culture.

Understanding the definitions of a literary work is crucial in order to obtain general knowledge on a literary work itself and especially novels in general. Widyahening and Wardhani (2016: 178) state that a literary work basically consists of characters as well as education therein. In addition to that, it is also known that a literary work can be used to reanimate local literature, express habits in customs of certain ethnics, habits in religions and patterns of behaviours and other kinds of habits which express diversity. Based on that explanation, it can be concluded that a literary work is basically related to human life in a society as it possesses certain qualities related to human beings, such as their behaviours, habits, cultures, and even beliefs.

Widyahening and Wardhani (2016: 178) also clearly explain that a literary work is one way to ask questions on every background of different figures in a story based on the uniqueness of a certain tribe, race, religion, and other aspects related to

human life. Based on the statement, it can be concluded that a literary work basically provides explanations on the aspects of human life that are considered hard to answer, such as the unique traits of a tribe, race, religion, and other aspects in human life.

A literary work is further explained by Easterlin (2013: 673) who clearly states that a literary work is viewed as a representative type of behaviours or art, written literature, an extremely recent and cognitively demanding medium, which illustrates the futility, or perhaps simply the wrong-headedness. It aims to pinpoint an ultimate cause for any specific art behaviours or object above and beyond the propensity to elaborate or “make special.” Based on that statement, it can be understood that a literary work is considered as not only one aspect but more. For example, a literary work can be considered as human behaviours in terms of art, written literature, a necessary medium, which describes a certain kind of failure or a stubbornness, all of which has meanings in their own ways, which can interestingly be put into an academic analysis.

Easterlin (2013: 679) further explains that if art is a mode of action that has evolved under challenges to survival, then the abstract nature of written literature constitutes an aesthetic form suitable for the complexity of human experiences under modernization. It can be indicated from the statement that a literary work is an art used as a mode of action which can adapt to the human experiences in the modern era. Therefore, there are two points that can be obtained from that statement. Firstly, a literary work changes based on the human ways of life. Secondly, in the complexity of a human life, art presents beauty appropriate for the ever-changing human life.

A definition of a novel is explained by Siahaan (2019: 75) who states that a novel as one of examples of literature is a fictional story in writing and has intrinsic and extrinsic elements. It is usually about human life in its interactions with the environment and each other. In a novel, author makes every effort to connect and show the readers the vivid descriptions of reality concerning life through stories contained in a novel. Based on the explanation, it can be concluded clearly that a novel is a story that is fictional, in which most of the stories are around human life with their interactions with the environment and other human beings explained in a story.

Sisakht (2014: 183) explains that the term 'novel' is now applied to a great variety of writings that is commonly attributed to extended works of prose fiction. From that short explanation, it can be indicated that a novel refers to a number kinds of writings, yet the words are deemed to be prose fiction which basically means that a novel is a kind of an imaginative writing.

A definition of gender with a comparison to sex is clearly given by Heidari et al. (2016: 2) who clearly explain that sex is usually categorized as female or male, although there is variation in the biological attributes that constitute sex and how those attributes are expressed, while gender refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviours and identities of female, male and gender-diverse people. Based on the explanation, it can be understood that first, gender and sex have different definitions where sex is biological and gender refers to the roles in a society. Second, gender is related to behaviours and identities in a diverse society or community. It is widely known that identity is something that is crucial for an individual to live his or her

life, where it is common for every person to always try to look for his or her true identity in life.

There are generally three problems of the study that are discussed and are aimed to be tackled in this thesis. Firstly, how men are described in the story and second, how women are described in the story. This thesis descriptions focus on how they are described in the family and how the social norms impact on the genders.

A brief illustration on the role of men in their culture taken from the novel says, “The people surged forward. The young men who kept order flew around, waving their palm fronds. Old men nodded to the beat of the drums and remembered the days when they wrestled to its intoxicating rhythm” Achebe (1958: 47). Based on that quotation taken from the novel, it can be indicated that there is a tradition in the culture of the people in a society where the dancers are normally men who perform a traditional dance before a wrestling contest begins, where the wrestles are also men.

A short example of women in the society can also be seen in this sentence taken from the novel, “and as he told them of the past they sat in darkness or the dim glow of logs, waiting for the women to finish their cooking” Achebe (1959: 54). Based on that quotation, it can be concluded that women have their role in the kitchen with cooking and taking care of the children, whereas men are supposed to be served with food by the women. This example indicates that men and women have their own roles in a society.

The topic of gender with problems of the study mentioned are mainly chosen because first, the topic of gender is distinct and frequently touched in the novel which means there are many aspects in the story that involve gender segregations to

some extents where men and women have their own respective roles in a society which can be problematic if violated and it is rather fascinating to explore such topic. Second, it is believed that the line between men and women must be fully understood and adjusted in order to avoid a situation where one crosses the line and provokes unwanted problems. Therefore, this novel is considered suitable to provide such illustrations with a clear and vivid deliverance of the story line. Due to those particular reasons the topic of gender is chosen as the object of study.

The novel was chosen as the main source of the analysis because firstly, the novel contains the problems of the study that are aimed to be discussed thoroughly, such as the roles of genders in various aspects in societies in the novel. Furthermore, the style of the novel in delivering the story is clear and fascinating, hence it is rather easy to understand and explore. Secondly, the setting of the story takes place in less advanced civilizations which means the culture related to the life of the people, especially gender is strong and unique compared to the culture in a modern city or more advanced civilizations. In addition to that, the differences of the ways of life of the people in a tribal society can be seen before and after the arrival of the white settlers. Due to those particular reasons, the novel is chosen to be the sole source of the analysis of this thesis.

## 1.2 Problems of Identification

Based on the background of the study explained above, the problems raised in this thesis are of three points as identified below:

1. How men are portrayed in the novel mentioned above?
2. How women are portrayed in the novel under research?

## 1.3 Objectives

The objectives of this thesis are drawn on the basis of the problems of identification given above and are formulated as the following.

1. To explain how men are portrayed in the novel mentioned above.
2. To explain how women are portrayed in the novel under research.

## 1.4 Scope

This thesis explores and discusses two main problems, which are how men are described in the story as well as how women are described in the story. The discussions revolve around how both genders are described in the family, how women are the victims of violence and how the social norms impact the two genders.

The data used and analysed in this thesis is from a book titled *Things Fall Apart* written by Chinua Achebe which was published in 1958. The data is in forms of text taken from the novel, more specifically the data taken are in forms of sentences related to the problems of the study and are presented in a form of quotations followed by the source pages in order to give reliability.

The theory employed to explain the general definition of gender is the one proposed by Khafidzy and Rosyidah in their academic journal entitled Clary Fray's

Femininity and Masculinity the Main Female Character in Cassandra Clare's Novel "The Mortal Instruments: City of Bones" which was published in 2017. This specific theory is chosen for reasons that not only it acknowledges the relation between gender and cultural beliefs, it also relates it to other aspects surrounding human beings in their life. This theory is shown more specifically in chapter two of this thesis.

The theory used for describing gender in a tribal society described in the source novel is the one proposed by Cyril Mary Pius Olatunji in his academic journal called *An Argument for Gender Equality in Africa* which was published in 2013. This particular theory is chosen not only because the theory is clear and understandable but also it is related to the life of African People in General. Therefore, the particular theory is deemed to be more suitable and relatable to clearly explain the gender roles in the African cultures in the novel. This theory is described in more details in chapter two of this thesis.

Method used for collecting and analysing the data is a method proposed by Donald Ary, Lucy Cheser Jacobs, Chris Sorensen, and Asghar Razavieh in their book entitled *Introduction to Research in Education (8th Edition)* which was published in 2010. This method is chosen because it includes clear as well as practical explanations and descriptions of the research design, data source, data collection technique and data analysis which will all be explained more specifically in chapter three.

## 1.5 Significances

This thesis is formulated as an effort of finding the main features in gender. Therefore, there are two significances therein, divided into theoretical significance and practical significance.

Theoretically, the result of the thesis is expected to contribute useful information and reference for future studies related to portrayal of gender in a novel. For instance, this thesis can be used as a reference when someone intends to conduct a study on a similar topic. Also, this thesis expected to enrich the knowledge of the readers who intend to learn the English terminologies related to gender or even English in general.

Practically, the findings of the thesis are hoped to help the readers understand the features of gender (men and women) so that they can understand certain lines and the roles between men and women which consequently can prevent unwanted actions, such as overpowering or discriminating a certain type of gender with bad purposes. In other words, each gender can join hands and respect each other by not harassing them physically and mentally. Therefore, by reading this thesis everyone is hoped come to an understanding that helping each other is crucial in a society.