

‘Things Fall Apart’

KS3 History-Lesson 3 of 4

Enquiry: How do we uncover the lived experience of those ruled by Empire in Africa?

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Cultural Imperialism

European colonial powers believed that their culture was superior to that of those living under their rule. European languages, religion and political structures were imposed on Africans, often using methods more complex than simply force. For example, Christian missionaries were sent to Africa to live with local peoples in an attempt to convert them to Christianity. These attacks on the culture of the colonised created an experience that was **destabilising** and confusing to Africans. Many of the colonised saw their culture **marginalised** within a single generation. Extract A from Achebe's novel, helps us to understand what this experience may have been like, to those colonised peoples.



Extract A

The arrival of the missionaries had caused a considerable stir...When they had all gathered, the white man began to speak to them...He told them that they worshipped false Gods, Gods of wood and stone...When this was interpreted to the men of Mbanta, they broke into derisive laughter. One morning Okonkwo's cousin, Amikwu, was passing by the church...when he saw Nwoye (Okonkwo's son) among the Christians...He was greatly surprised and when he got home he went straight to Okonkwo's hut and told him...It was late afternoon before Nwoye returned...'Where have you been? (Okonkwo) stammered' 'Answer me before I kill you!'

Things Fall Apart, Nigerian Author Chinua Achebe, 1958



Reading First Hand Accounts

Source B offers us a highly interesting insight into the experiences of the colonised. As it is a communication between two colonised peoples, both African leaders, it is not written for or interfered with by a white or colonial audience. It captures the fears which African leaders had about how white Europeans would take over. It describes how Europeans exploit internal divisions within African societies and how promises made by colonists were not to be trusted. We can also sense the fear and **foreboding**, which many African leaders must have experienced during the early part of the colonial era.



Source B

You think you will retain your independent Chieftainship after I have been destroyed...but, my dear Kapitein (chieftain), you will eternally regret your action in having handed over to the white man the right to govern your country. This war between us is not nearly as heavy a burden as you seem to have thought when you did this momentous thing.

Nama Leader, Hendrik Witbooi, writes to his rival Tjimuaha, 1891



Glossary

Destabalise: To weaken a structure, including for example a society.

Marginalise: To make an identity or group of people, feel unimportant.

Foreboding: A deep sense of fear or concern as to what is to come in the future.



Comprehension Questions

1. Which Nigerian author wrote 'Things Fall Apart'?
2. What does a 'missionary' attempt to do?
3. Identify one feature of Extract A which a historian must be aware of when using it to uncover the experience of colonialism.
4. Identify one feature of Source B which makes it valuable to a historian trying to uncover the experience of Empire.
5. What can we uncover from the extract and source studied in this lesson, about the experiences of living under colonialism?

Sentence starter: One experience we can uncover from Extract A is...

