



Historical Context

Imperialism refers to the practice of domination of one country to expand territory, power and influence. Cultural superiority on the part of the imperialist, resulted in judging the way of life, traditions and beliefs of those colonised as inferior and worthy of replacement. Imperialists were often brutal in the way they treated the indigenous population.

The Scramble for Africa in the 1880s to 1900 was motivated by the idea that, not only will colonisers benefit from colonisation, but colonies would gain access to superior European goods and influence. European countries realised that by taking control of African territories and resources they could secure a cheap supply of raw materials that would ensure industrial success and overall economic prosperity.

Things Fall Apart is set in the 1800s, when Europeans viewed Africa as a dangerous continent of cannibals. Explorers took stories back to Europe of strange traditions, people and customs. During this time Africa was referred to as the dark continent, maybe because of the skin color of the people; the unexplored jungle areas; the customs which seemed barbaric to outsiders; or because of their lack of Christianity. Missionaries arrived in Africa to convert tribes from their primitive beliefs. Using the passivity of the missionaries, the colonisers gained a footing within the African tribes. In the wake of the missionaries came English education, law and trading. Africans were distrustful of European Christians at first, but many who felt marginalised by the customs of their societies eventually converted for acceptance.

As more members within the clans adopted European values, the clans became divided, and conflicts arose. The resolution of these conflicts were subject to British governmental rules and not the customs of the village. When conflicts were directed at colonialists, British soldiers would often slaughter entire villages instead of punishing guilty individuals, to establish rule.

African societies changed from being determined by common language and cultures to a land divided by political borders that divided it into about 50 nation states.

Adapted from: <https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/imperialism-and-socialism-context-africa>

<https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/565351/things-fall-apart-by-chinua-achebe>

<https://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/t/things-fall-apart/about-things-fall-apart>