

Obi's parents and  
their reluctance to  
accept obi's  
engagement to clara



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“Osu is like leprosy in the minds of our people.”

When Obi makes the decision to marry Clara, an osu, both the Umoufian community, and his parents strongly oppose this marriage, as it is a union which will bring suffering to all of Obi's future descendants. This conflict causes Obi's familial relationships to crumble, which serves as one of the factors leading up to his final descent into corruption, the most notable relationship being that of the one between Obi and his mother. Achebe uses this to show readers the prominent role of culture in the life of Nigerians, that an individual whose ancestors had been devoted to the gods would be shunned and alienated from society.

The reaction of Obi's parents towards his engagement to Clara is logical and understandable. Marrying Clara would cause Obi's children and future descendants to become outcasts in the Nigerian society. Obi's father even points out that osu is “like leprosy”, emphasising the social stigma surrounding people possessing the label. By marrying Clara, Obi will be dooming all of his future children. The fact that Obi is his parents' only son makes this decision even more significant, as he is the only hope of continuing the Okonkwo family, and his actions would lead to the entire family tree becoming tainted. The insanity behind deciding to marry an osu can also be seen when Clara bluntly tells Obi “I am an osu”, and expect Obi to immediately understand why they cannot marry. As someone who herself bears the label, she of all people would know the degree of isolation of osu from society, further emphasising the consequences of Obi marrying Clara. Thus, Achebe makes it clear to readers that Isaac and Hannah's response to Obi's engagement is natural, and that Obi is the one who has been so

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detached from his own culture that he does not see the flaw behind his decision.

Obi's father tries to convince Obi to rethink his decision of marrying Clara for the sake of his children. He warns Obi that his future generations will "curse his memory", and that it is a terrible thing for a man to "curse his own child". Isaac says he was cursed by Obi's grandfather, implying that Obi's decision is the curse. On the other hand, Isaac might be trying to show Obi that his decision will curse his descendants, and that doing so is horrible. Isaac may also be referring to his own separation from the society after deciding to convert to Christianity. He says that he 'walked through fire to become a Christian', showing that he has an inkling of an idea as to what Obi and his future generations will have to go through if he were to marry Clara. However, converting to Christianity is in no way comparable to marrying an osu, and Isaac references this, saying that "it is deeper than that". Thus, readers can understand that Isaac Okonkwo opposes the marriage in an effort to prevent the curse from being passed on through Obi's decision.

Obi's father shows that he does not want Obi to personally suffer by marrying Clara. As a Christian, Isaac is not personally against the idea of marrying osu, as he has, as Obi points out, "seen the light of the Gospel". However, he understands the consequences of marrying an osu, and still tells Obi 'you cannot marry the girl' as the Umuofian society would never accept the marriage. Isaac understands Obi's view of there being nothing wrong with marrying an osu, but because he does not want Obi to be isolated from his kinsmen, Isaac desperately tries to make Obi change his mind. To Isaac, community is crucial, especially to Obi who lives away from <https://assignbuster.com/obis-parents-and-their-reluctance-to-accept-obis-engagement-to-clara/>

his village as Isaac says that in a foreign land, "one should always move near one's kinsman". Isaac is less concerned about how Obi's decision would affect himself, and cares more the social implications which would affect and harm Obi in the future.

Obi's mother, compared to his father, has a much bigger reaction. When she finds out of Obi's engagement, she threatens suicide, saying that "you (Obi) shall have my blood on your head, because I shall kill myself". This is particularly significant and shocking, especially when considering the fact that Hannah is a Christian; in Christianity, suicide is a sin that will lead one to end up in hell. Throughout the novel, it is shown that Hannah is more traditional and cultural than Obi's father, but have accepted and complied to the ways of Christianity due to her husband, and is a devout Christian woman. Obi's engagement has such a large impact on her that she forgoes her loyalty to Christianity and reverts back to her cultural believes, showing the extent to which she opposes the engagement. However, Hannah seems to also acknowledge Obi's stubbornness and subconsciously knows that Obi will persist with the marriage regardless of opposition, and tells Obi to marry Clara only after she has died. She disapproves of the marriage, and refuses to witness it happening. She, unlike Isaac, is personally against osu, and her threat of suicide leaves a larger impact on Obi who has always seen himself as having a closer bond with his mother. It is ironic how Obi was previously confident that he would be able to convince his mother, as this implies that Obi may not be as close to his mother as he initially thought.

The reluctance of Obi's parents in accepting his engagement is expected. In fact, Obi may be fortunate for being brought up in a less traditional, Christian  
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family, else his father would have likely had a bigger reaction. The fact that both of his parents opposes this union, shows how bad of a decision it is, on a personal, familial, and communal level. Achebe emphasises Obi's idealism and detachment from his own culture — both crucial factors which leads to his descent into corruption. Readers realise the marriage of Clara and Obi is impossible — a fact that Obi himself unfortunately refuses to accept until it is too late.