

Theme of cultural transition

[Literature](#), [Novel](#)



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The theme of cultural transition is well portrayed throughout the two books; *Things Fall Apart* and *The Lion and The Jewel*. On the other hand, the elements of change in both books defer, as in *Things Fall Apart*, what brings the change originates from the outside, that is, the missionaries; while Lakunle acts as the element of change from inside the community. Lakunle understands the customs, and he even grew up practicing them, but after he comes into contact with the outside world, his views are changed.

The cultural transition is seen when Lakunle tries to oppose the custom of bride price and calls it uncivilized. He tries to win Sidi's love using the tactics he has learned from the modernized world but fails terribly. The missionaries in Okonkwo case also seek to change the ways of the people, they introduce formal education and try to bring civilization to Umuofia. Their efforts are derailed when Okonkwo opposes them and kills one of their messengers.

Conflict is also in both stories; Lakunle fight against the community's customs is a sign of conflict. Baroka Sidi and the rest of Ilunju village are traditionists who are uneducated who conflicts with the educated Lakunle a school teacher educated and influenced by the western culture. In the play, *The Lion and the Jewel* tradition wins against modernity which is evidence by Sidi marrying the traditional chief. The issue of the bride price causes Lakunle to be considered as the village fool. He also fights alone as no one else in the community is willing to share his views; not even his beloved Sidi. Where there is a conflict there is bound to be consequences, in Okonkwo case, his conflict with the missionaries resulted in death and feelings of

betrayal. This paper will discuss the various instances where both the Jewel and the Lion and Things Fall Apart portray the theme of cultural change and theme of conflict.

Change and conflict go hand in hand; especially in a place where what is being changed has been there for a long time. Culture is collectiveness of behaviours acquired by a member of a given group or community. Thus culture is the practices, social behaviour, and beliefs of a given community. In the books we are looking at cultural conflict is shown between the modern and traditional cultures. Cultural transition in both *The Lion and The Jewel* and *Things Fall Apart* is eminent as portrayed in the characters of both Lakunle and Okonkwo. Both characters try to bring change to their environment; Okonkwo tries to fight against cultural change while Lakunle is for the change.

Cultural African practices were regarded to be sacred, and anything or anyone that interfered with them was considered to be an enemy of the community. The cultural beliefs that the African communities held were believed to hold a certain purpose, and they were what united them with their ancestors. Common belief and practice also symbolized a sense of unity, and it was rare for individuals to separate themselves from this kind of life. For those that managed to separate themselves, they came back and shook these foundations and were regarded with suspicion and even considered to be fools or slaves of the colonists.

Conflict is said to be the disagreement between individuals or ideas. In the case of our study conflict can be defined as the clash or disagreement of

cultures. Culture is a unique phenomenon cherished and protected dearly by a given community. The two books; the Jewel and Lion and Things Fall Apart show how African cultures are subjected to imposition and displacement by the western culture. Whenever there is change conflict comes long for instance in the case of Lakunle, Lakunle a school teacher feels that he is modernized than any other person in the village. Thus he is not ready to pay the bride price and take Sidi as his wife. Sidi, on the other hand, does not agree with Lakunle she feels that when she accepts to be married by him without the bride price, the village people will be against her. Later on, Sidi is married to the traditional chief and leave Lakunle who is considered a fool by the village people and face opposition from them. The piece shows that in the instance of change there exist disagreement of given ideas.

Lakunle is not convincingly representing the modern ideas as he claims. It is evidence that he misunderstands the modern books he reads and the cultural beliefs. For instance, Lakunle tell Sidi that she has a small brain, meaning women brains are deemed to the smaller and dysfunctional compared to the males brains. His thinking on the women brain capacity is dictated by the traditional belief in his community while he calls himself civilized while in the civilized community everyone is equal be it a man of women. Lakunle is also full of fascinations of the superficial modern way of life, for example, the dances, and ballroom and night clubs, showing that he believes in half-baked ideas that justify his actions of refusing to pay the bride price to Sidi. Baroka the 62-year-old chief oppose development brought about by the white people, he believes that the development destroys the

way people live. On the other hand, he feels that he should learn a thing from Lakunle as well as Lakunle learn from him.

In the *Things Fall Apart* we see Okonkwo confronted by complications due to cultural conflicts presented by the white men. After he leaves to exile, the white men were able to thrive and to spread their gospel in the village. When he came back, he meets a different community in which he is unable to live in. Everyone including his son had converted to Christianity. Due to his strong belief in the traditional culture, he chooses to die rather than complying with the white men.

Women in both *Things Fall Apart*, and *The Lion and The Jewel* are considered to be man's property. They can be purchased and accumulated to man's wealth. Their only role is to get married and have children. In *Things Fall Apart* Okonkwo acquires many wives who he expects to bear many children to promote his legacy in the community and rival that of his father who he regarded as a failure (Achebe, 13). Baroka on the other hand in *The Lion and The Jewel* acquires wives to promote his status in the community (Soyinka, 4). He is surprised that in five full months he has not acquired a wife, meaning he considered wives to be an addition to his vast wealth. Lakunle undermines the tradition of purchasing a woman by proposing to Sidi and telling her he will marry her without paying the bride price. In this case, the tradition of paying the bride price is condemned by Lakunle while Baroka embraces it and win Sidi. Women are not supposed to make key decisions in the society, but with modernity, women take roles which there were not supposed to like the harvesting of yams in *Things Fall Apart*. We also see Sidi

admiring her picture in the magazine and feels that she deserved better men from outside world since she is being seen by people in the western world. She is held up by the culture and even fails to marry Lakunle a modernized man since he does not want to follow the culture by paying the bride price.

In *The Lion and the Jewel*, Baroka is the chief, and he represents traditional norms and customs. He stands against any foreign change such as the building of railroad near his village. He agrees with the rail contractors signs a letter that states that the village soil is unfit to support the train engine. He does this so that the rail can be moved away from the village. Being a staunch traditionalist, he understands that the presence of rail in the village will lead to penetration of more white who will change the village people culture to western culture. He promotes the paying of bride price that is why Sidi prefers him to the modernized Lakunle (Soyinka, 6). In *Things Fall Apart*, the chief also represents the community customs and also moral authority. He struggles with the new political and religious orders introduced by colonialism which he terms as unmanly and feels that he will betray the community if he complies with the new ways. Okonkwo condemns cultural change since he fears losing social status. After coming from exile, he is unable to adapt to the colonizer way of life which leads to his suicide. Although his stand is not as rigid as that of Baroka in the face of the British Colonists; he maintains law and order in the community.

In both texts, any change that is introduced by either colonist or modernity is met with resistance. Okonkwo opposes anything that is related to the British administration. Such that when he returned from exile, he could not tolerate

the colonizer's way of life and ended up taking his life (Achebe, 58). Baroka resists any form of development pioneered by the colonialists, for example, he rejects the construction of the railway line, saying that the soil along the village is fragile and cannot sustain the weight of the engine. Lakunle, on the other hand, a modernized school teacher tries to modernize his community by changing the rule of the bride price. He faces rejection from Sidi and the entire village for going against the culture that dictates marriage rules in the community. He also wishes for construction of motor roads and railroads. His desires and conversations are met with less enthusiasm than he had expected.

Cultural values are highly upheld in both texts, and that is why any threat towards these values is met with negative reaction. Baroka is a staunch traditionalist that is why he enjoys being a polygamist and does not tolerate the introduction of the modern railroad (Soyinka, 4). He also uses traditional knowledge and practices to win Sidi unlike Lakunle who denounce the cultural practice of paying the bride price. Lakunle support modernization he wishes that railroads were built in the village which never happened due to the highly upheld cultural values. Lakunle does not understand why the community promotes backwardness and choose to stay in darkness. He tries to change the cultural values, but he fails terribly. Okonkwo seems like the only one still concerned with the Umuofia's cultural values. He denies the white men entry into the village and strongly refused their cultural value to be changed especially in the context of religion. He also sent away anyone who complied with the white men and considered as an outcast in the community. His reactions, although meant to maintain

stability, causes a lot of instability in the community that causes Okonkwo to take his life.

The educated people in the two books seek to spread the modern ideas to the uneducated people who believe in their old ways of life. They preach out their knowledge with the aim of changing the tribal people to modern ways. Education is strongly rejected by the traditional people who do not see any good the education can offer to them in sustaining their daily lives. Lakunle is the educated person in the village he is rejected by the people in the village due to his modernized way. The rejection is portrayed by the way he dresses and talks to Sidi. He is also considered a fool by the village people when he refuses to pay the bride price to Sidi and loses her to chief Baroka. Sidi is also not willing to be associated with Lakunle due to his modernized behaviours which do not respect their culture.

In the things fall apart the colonization is mostly addressed religiously unlike the Lion and the Jewel. The whites condemn the traditional people religion where they tell them that their gods are evil and cannot help them since they direct them to kill and discriminate innocent people. They introduce their God whom they believe takes care of them and is just and good to all. The traditional people reject their religion and fight against it lead by Igbo. After Okonkwo come from exile, he finds a changed community where everyone has turned to the white man's way. He finds that some churches have been built together with schools. To his surprise, he finds that even his son has converted to Christianity. His staunch belief in the traditional way of

life make him feel out of place, he cannot put up with the new ways and eventually commit suicide.

The two books prominently discuss the theme of culture clash as a result of rapid modernization brought about by the colonial people. Culture transition is highly advocated by the white people who want to see the last outdated African culture in the featured communities. On the other hand, Africans fight any change advocated by the white people. They feel that they have a rich culture and they should preserve it. Conflict arises when the two cultures meet since each side wants to stand by culture and beliefs.