

Things fall apart 7



After the stock market crash of 1929, hundreds of people ended their lives because they just couldn't cope with the fact that they had lost such a great deal of money. Some had lost their life savings - but most hadn't. In fact, most of them still had enough to live

better than a lot of lower-class families. But why had they committed suicide? Many prisoners who have been institutionalized for thirty or forty years have been known to commit suicide not long after they are released. Why? Isn't freedom a better alternative

than imprisonment? The answer to both these questions is the same: CHANGE. Even if the change is for the better, a good number of people can't handle it. In the novel Things fall Apart, the main character Okonkwo is driven to suicide by change he can't handle.

The book is written by Chinua Achebe, a twentieth century author. Born in Nigeria, Achebe grew up in a transitional culture much like the one described in the book. He is currently a professor of literature at the University of Nigeria. Many factors can be

attributed to the cause of Okonkwo's demise, But the three most drastic ones are: hisson's conversion to Christianity, the change in daily life the new religion brings, and his frustration caused by his apathetic clansmen.

Nwoye's conversion to Christianity was a sharp blow to Okonkwo because the Christians are looked down upon as being insane. The missionary tells them that all of the Ibo's gods are false images of wood and stone, and can do them no harm. Upon hearing

this, the men of Mbanta decide that ' these men must be mad for how else could they say that Ani and Amadiora were harmless? And Idemili and Ogwugwo too?';(146) The missionary goes on to tell them about the Holy Trinity. ' At the end of it Okonkwo is fully convinced that the man is mad.'; (147) Also, the first members of the new church

were the clan's rejects, like Nnka who ' has had four previous pregnancies and childbirths. but each time she bears twins, and they had been immediately thrown away. Her husband and his family were already becoming highly critical of such a woman and are not unduly perturbed when they find that she has fled to join the Christians. It is a good riddance.';(151) The other group of people that join are the osu, or outcasts. The changes the new religion brings almost pushes Okonkwo to the edge. He is

worried that the religion will spread, destroying the traditional moral values that the clan has had for generations, and that it will cause everyone to forget about the ancestors. Okonkwo also suddenly has to adjust to the new government, the new laws saying such

nonsense like twins couldn't be properly disposed of and dead infants couldn't be mutilated. Now, if the evil ogbanje wasn't taught a lesson, what was going to prevent it from coming back and dying again? And what was this deal with hangings for minor crimes? Beforehand, even if you murdered someone you were only banished from the village, certainly not put to death! ' Okonkwo is deeply grieved. And it isn't just a personal grief. He mourns for the clan, which he sees breaking up and falling apart';(183) right before his very eyes. But the thing that really gets to Okonkwo is the

fact that ' there are many men and women in Umuofia who do not feel as strongly as him about the new dispensation. The white man has indeed brought a lunatic religion, but he has also built a trading store and for the first time palm-oil and kernel has

become things of great price. and much money is flowing into Umuofia.';

(178) This would of course seem to be a good thing, like freedom over imprisonment, but is change nonetheless and Okonkwo is not happy about it.

Another factor contributing to Okonkwo's death is the frustration that was caused by the apathy of the other clansmen. Okonkwo is a warrior by nature

' and whenever he is angry and can not get his words out quickly enough, he uses his fists.';(4) ' He is a man of action, a man of war. Unlike his father he

can stand the look of blood. In Umuofia's latest war he is the first one to bring home a human head.';(10) This is in contrast to the rest of the clan

who believe that the missionaries pose no threat. Okonkwo

however, feels that immediate action must be taken and is ready and willing to do anything to drive them and their absurd, backwards religion out of the Ibo's land. But since few seem to care, and there are some who actually seem to like the change, Okonkwo decides

to take matters into his own hands. In a fit of rage ' Okonkwo draws his machete. The head messenger who had come to order the meeting to be broken up crouches to avoid the blow. It is useless. Okonkwo's machete descends twice and the man's head is

laying beside his uniformed body.';(204) ' Okonkwo stands looking at the dead man. He knows that Umuofia will not go to war. He knows because they

let the other messengers escape. They have broken into tumult instead of action,';(205) ' and he mourns for the warlike men of Umuofia, who have so unaccountably have become

soft like women.';(183) Change, and the frustration brought by change killed Okonkwo. Mabe things would have been completely different if only a war had been declared. In my opinion, the absence of war to prevent this shifting of lifestyles was the straw that broke the camel's back. Or you could say the rope that broke Okonkwo's neck.