

Good example of themes in things fall apart critical thinking

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



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The major themes of in the novel, “ Things Fall Apart” by Achebe includes the tussle between tradition and change, the varied ways of interpreting masculinity and language or dialect as a symbol of cultural disparity have been discussed in this essay. The themes have been exposed mainly through the main character in the novel called Okonkwo. The novel presents the traditional ways of life of the clan of Igbo at a time when they were faced with the dilemma of embracing change that was brought by the European colonialists and missionaries.

The theme of varying interpretation of masculinity starts with the relationship of Okonkwo with his late father that serves to shape most of his ambitious demeanor and violent nature. He is so ambitious and focused in rising above the legacy of indolent behavior and spendthrift character that his father left behind. He views his father’s legacy as effeminate and therefore weak. The outlined association is inherent in the language of the clan as the narrator states that the word used to refer to man who hasn’t taken and exclusive, prestige indicating titles is agbala, a word that can also be used to mean “ woman.” In most of the story, the notion of Okonkwo’s manliness is not related to the issues of the clan. The narrator portrays him as one who is fond of associating masculinity with being aggressive and he feels and thinks that the only emotion he can express is anger. Due to his feeling and reasoning he repeatedly beats his many wives and at times he even goes to an extreme of threatening to terminate their lives. The narrator highlights his character of not taking time to think about things before taking necessary actions. Due to this negative myopic trait he is seen to be fond of acting impetuously and rashly. He behaves this way irrespective of the fact

that even the other people who are effeminate do not exhibit such traits.

Unlike Okonkwo, Obierika was usually an individual who often thought concerning things before acting. This is depicted in the incidence when he refuses to join the group of men that was on the mission to kill Ikemefuna. On the other hand, Okonkwo willingly joins the party that is scheduled to execute his son and goes ahead to stab him violently using his machete to avoid being seen as a weak fellow.

Masculinity is also seen when the act of exiling him from the village does not discipline his senses but reinforces his idea that women are weaker than men. During his time in exile, he dwelled among the relatives from the land of his mother. However, he resents the duration in its wholeness. The exile offers an opportunity to him of interacting with the feminine species and getting in touch with them. He also gets the chance of acknowledging the ancestors from his maternal side. In his interaction with his ancestors, he is spotted as he reminds himself of the fact that his kinsmen are not as fierce and warlike as compared to what he remembers about the village of Umuofia. He blames them very much about their liking of negotiations, their compliance and always striving to avoid bloodshed and anger. According to the understanding of Okonkwo his uncle Uchendu demonstrates this antiwar-like nature and therefore acts effeminate.

Okonkwo's masculinity is also emphasized by the fact that he has no time for life pleasures such as dancing, music and enjoyment. He craves for wealth and power in all its dimensions. He is seen to want to bring up and maintain a robust household composed of many wives and many children. As the family head, he recognizes the fact that he should provide shelter and food

and all other goodies in the life they live in the clan environment. Okonkwo masculinity is also seen as in his role as a soldier or warrior. He wants to be physically robust, giving protection to the clan from external threats that could see his change his way of life, just as he is strong in the provision of shelter and food to his family. The narrator portrays him as a person who wants a title in the clan to enable him to earn respect from both the villagers and his family. Again he wants to get involved and shape the process of making decision in the clan and to gain fame in the whole land.

Another aspect of Okonkwo's masculinity is evidenced in his longing to pass the respect for tradition and values to his little ones both female and male. He longs to see his male children growing to own households and be in the position to deliver sufficient shelter and food for their families just the way he does to his family. For his girls he wants them to be good wives who will bear children and who will also be dependable. In doing this he resists the aspects of change as he longs to see his children emulate him exactly as he is. However some villagers do not concur with his philosophy and they view the idea of resisting change as being a major weakness. They view him as someone who has failed to embrace change that incorporates new ideas. His eldest son is an example of a person who disagrees with him on the matter. The perspective of masculinity is also evidenced in the way Okonkwo relates to his son. The son of Okonkwo has never been so strong and promising in his perspective of observation. In the instance when Okonkwo shoots a person accidentally and is forced to exile, things started to change in the clan. The whites come with a new religion of Christianity alongside the cultures and laws of the Europeans. According to Okonkwo this is foolishness

but to his son, the matter of cultural change is not a big issue. His son differed with his on his view about valor or sense of duty that was being impounded on him. On return from exile he went to join the newly installed church and he starts learning on how to embrace the virtues of tolerance, the need for a legal system and the wider aspect of equality for everybody who lives in the clan. By taking a different direction socially, he is breaking free from the traditional bondage of his father and ancestors that have been used for many years. Okonkwo fails to see that some of the aspects of the new government and religion are positive and beneficial thereof. He does not want to imagine that his ancestors together with him are on the wrong and he vows that he will never accept the new notions of religion and government as better than their old ways.

The notions about masculinity, values of the family and Okonkwo's perception of duties of the males are very traditional and antiquated. He fails to broaden up his mind to the change and refuses to compromise when the brand new and better ideas are brought to him in form of the culture and religion of the European.

The theme of language as a symbol of difference in culture is also portrayed in the book. The aspect of language is a very crucial theme in several levels. When representing the imaginative feature that is usually the Igbo language, the author stresses that the continent of Africa is not an incomprehensible and silent, as books have perceived it in the past. Achebe therefore indicates that the language of the Igbo is too complex to be directly translated to English by incorporating the Igbo words in the novel. The culture of the Igbo is almost impossible to be comprehended in the framework of the values of

the European colonialists. He also illuminates that the continent has got many languages that differ from one another for instance the Umuofia villagers are amused at Mr. Brown's translator due to the fact that his dialect is a little divergent from theirs.

An aspect of the use of language to portray cultural difference has been shown in the way the author does his literature work on this novel. On a narrower level, it is really important that the Achebe resolved to write this novel in English. By doing this his intention was to enable the west read it. The novel was not meant to be read by Nigerians alone, but by the whole world. His main motive was to amend the spoilt portrait of the continent of Africa that was soiled by the authors of the colonial time. He also wanted to utilize this opportunity to critique the image of the continent. By the constant use of songs, proverbs and folk tales that were translated from the language of Igbo, the author succeeded in capturing and conveying the beauty, rhythms, cadence and structures of the language of the Igbo.

The theme of the struggle between change and tradition is also seen in the novel in several ways outlined as follows. Things Fall Apart as a novel is written based on culture and traditions at a period of change, it captures how the reality and prospects of change impact on different characters. The decision as to whether the idea of embracing change ought to be given a privilege alongside traditional practices usually involve the aspect of individual status. For Okonkwo, accepting the religious orders and political changes will mean a loss in his manliness. He resists the new religious and political orders with the reason that he feels that they are not masculine enough and that he will not be manly if he agrees to embrace or welcome

them. It is argued that to some extent the fear to embrace political and social change is due to the fact that he fears to lose the status that has been bestowed upon him by the society. His self-worth is grounded on the standard that are set by traditions by which he is judged by the society. Many of the outcasts of the clan are inspired to embrace the virtues of Christianity by the system of evaluation of the self. The outcasts see Christianity as a system of refuge from the cultural values of the Igbo that advocated for their ranking below everyone else in the society. In the Christian community the new converts are made to enjoy a status that is more elevated than the status that the traditions of the Igbo accord them in the society.

The tussle between change and tradition proceeds when the villagers are torn between the thought of embracing and resisting the change and they are faced with the dilemma of striving to establish the best way possible to put up to the reality of change that had knocked at their door steps. Most of the villagers however are excited and happy about the techniques and the opportunities that were brought about by the missionaries. The influence of the Europeans though threatens to turn off the necessity for the knowledge of the crude traditional techniques of harvesting, building, cooking and even farming. The traditional methods of performing chores that were important at some point in the past are now seen dispensable at a given level. In the event of writing the novel, he indicates how dependable the traditional methods were through story-telling and dialect and hence how fast the process of abandoning the language of the Igbo in replacement with English could potentially lead to the abolition of the traditions.

Works Cited

Achebe, Chinua. *Things fall apart*. New York: Anchor Books, 1994. Print.

Ghosh, Tapan Kumar. *Chinua Achebe's Things fall apart: a critical study*. New Delhi: Prestige Books International, 2012. Print.

Innes, Catherine Lynette, and Bernth Lindfors. *Critical perspectives on Chinua Achebe*. Washington: Three Continents Press, 1978. Print.