

Modern world: things fall apart

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



“ We cannot leave the matter in his hands because he doesn’t not understand our customs, just as we do not understand his. We say he is foolish because he does not know our ways, and perhaps he says we are foolish because we do not know his. Let him go away” (*1). This quote shows the major theme of the book which is change vs tradition. The quote shows the theme perfectly; basically it shows the ignorance of most of the Umuofia clan and their fear of the white peoples culture taking over theirs.

They are dealing with the question of whether change should be privileged over tradition. The people of Umuofia want a little change but at the same time they have fear of completely losing their way of life, the people are divided on the subject at hand at what the right and wrong thing to do is, and how much is too much change. When the first white man was seen there was controversy already. The man was seen in Abame, the elders immediately went to see their oracle out of fear. The oracle told the elders that “ the strange man would break their clan and spread destruction among them” (*2). So the people killed the white man immediately out of fear. Then a few weeks later out of revenge three white men went to the Abame market and shot everyone except the people that weren't there.

The Abame people were foolish they should have known “ Never kill a man who says nothing” (* 3). But regardless of why the shooting happened at the Abame market the gossip had started and the fear had set in for the white men. After the Abame incident, other white people began to show. The white missionaries went to Umuofia and had begun building churches there and began getting converts. Not everyone was fond of the new religion though, but the leaders of the clan were not scared because they believed that the

weird faith would not last. Missionaries also arrived in the village of Mbanta. The missionaries begun telling the people of the villages about the new religion “ We have been sent by this great God to ask you to leave your wicked ways and false gods and turn to Him so that you may be saved when you die” (*4).

The missionaries started to have the people of the villages question their religion and culture, and to make them think am I just worshipping false gods of wood and stone? Is all the rituals and killing and destroying innocent children actually right? Many questions began to stir. One person in particular who was captivated by the new religion was Nwoye, Okonkwo’s son. Nwoye became one of the first converts, but because of this change with his life that meant that he was no longer part of Okonkwo’s life or ever be considered his son. Even though this hurt Nwoye, he felt a relief in his life, so he thought that he could find other people within his new religion that would love him more then his father ever had. As the missionaries kept on spreading the word of their new religion and changing peoples life’s, they decided to ask for some land to build their church. So the clan decided to give them as much land somewhere as they wanted. The missionaries were very happy that they were getting the land, but what they didn’t know was the land they were getting was called the “ evil forest” because it was alive with sinister forces and was evil.

The “ evil forest” was where the clan had buried everyone that died from evil diseases. There was a so called curse that was set onthe forest, so the people of Mbanta expected the missionaries to all be dead within four days.

Not knowing of the curse the missionaries began immediately clearing out the forest and building their church, and as each day went by and no one was dying the people of Mbanta were questioned about why the curse wasn't working on the white men. The church in Mbanta kept getting stronger and stronger as each day passed and was getting more converts. Okonkwo remained angered at the new changes in Mbanta, “ until the abominable gang was chased out of the village with whips there would be no peace” (*5). Although some did not mind the changes “ It is not our custom to fight for our gods, let us not presume to do so now” (*6). Although everyone had their own opinions of the matter at hand, the assembly out of fear decided to exclude the christians from the privileges and life of the clan.

Even though the new faith had only a few converts at first, the christians quickly grew and had become a small community and they were not going to be easily shut down. After the seven years of Okonkwo living in Mbanta, he was finally able to go back to Umuofia after being exiled. Although things had been changing in Mbanta, Okonkwo was unaware that Umuofia had also been changing. He still expected to just go back and have everything still be the same, even though that was the total opposite. The new church was not the only thing that had changed since he was gone in Umuofia; the white men also brought a new government to the village. The men of power were no longer the high titled men, chief priests, and the elders, the men of power were now the District of Commissioner, and the court messengers. The District Commissioner had become the head of the government in Umuofia who judged cases ignorantly, then there were the court messengers who

guarded the new prison, which was filled with citizens who would not listen to the white man's laws.

Okonkwo was very confused about what has happened to the village he once had some power over. “ What is it that has happened to our people? Why have they lost the power to fight (*7)? ” Okonkwo was so flabbergasted about how his once perfectly traditional south african village had changed into a government controlled christian village. So many things were changing, not only did the white men bring a new religion, and a new government, but they also brought trading to the village, which helped the village have more of amoneyflow and schools were beginning to be built. The clan had become barely recognizable to Okonkwo anymore, it was falling apart in his eyes. The village had not only begun to fall apart in Okonkwo's eyes but in others soon to follow too. On the annual worship of the earth goddess day, one of the egwugwu's masks were accidentally torn off by Enoch, which was one of the greatest crimes a man could commit. Enoch showed everyone that that the egwugwu's were merely men impersonating spirits, therefore Enoch had basically killed an ancestral spirit.

From Enoch doing that he helped the missionaries falsify the Umuofia's religion and show that it was all superstition, but he also re-sparked the conflict between the christian church and the clan. That was the last straw for the clan with dealing with the christians, “ Tell him to go back to his house and leave us alone... But this shrine which he built must be destroyed. We shall no longer allow it in our midst” (*8). The clan came in agreement to burns down the church; which makes Okonkwo very happy for once.

The men in Umuofia finally begun to take back the village that was once theirs, so the next few days the men were armed and stayed aware. As the men were on cloud nine thinking things might end up going back to the traditional ways, they forgot to remember that their was still a government. The district commissioner was at a tour when the clan decided to burn down the church and not follow the laws. But when the District Commissioner did come back from his tour, Mr. Smith, who was the head missionary , immediately caught the Commissioner up on what had happened while he was away. After finding out what had happened the Commissioner got his messenger to round up the leaders of Umuofia for a meeting. When all six leaders, including Okonkwo, met up at the commissioners headquarters they were asked what had happened, before they even had a chance to explain what had happened then they were immediately arrested.

“ I have brought you here because you joined together to molest others, to burn people’s houses and their place of worship” (*8). The six leaders were fined with two hundred bags of cowries and were sentenced to prison and would not be released until they paid the fine, and if they choose not to they would be taken to Umuru to be hung. Thankfully each one of the leaders paid the fine, and were set free. Okonkwo was so incredible angered when he was let out of the prison. Later that night when he went back to his hut he could barley even sleep. All he could think about was revenge, and how no matter what he was not going to back out of his plan. The next morning he went to the meeting place, which was the marketplace where he was going to meet Obierika.

“ All our gods are weeping. Idemili is weeping, Ogwugwu is weeping, Agbala is weeping, and all the others. Our dead fathers are weeping because of the shameful sacrilege they are suffering and the abomination we have all seen with our eyes” (*9). Okonkwo decided that enough was enough he was not going to stand by and watch his clan fall apart any longer. “ We must root out this evil. And if our brothers take the side of evil we must root them out too. And we must do it now.

We must bale this water now that it is only ankle deep... ” (*10). And that is exactly what Okonkwo did. He stood by his word, and he did what he felt was right. He shot and killed a messenger at the market place, where every person witnessed with their own eyes.

Shortly after this the District Commissioner arrived at Okonkwo’s compound to retrieve him to be killed because of the sin he had just committed, but the commissioner along with a few other people had realized he was too late the deed had been already done. Okonkwo was found hanging dead on a tree behind his compound; he committed suicide. When Okonkwo was found dead Obierika turned to the District Commissioner and said, “ That man was one of the greatest men in Umuofia. You drove him to kill himself; and now he will be buried like a dog” (*11). So rather than wait to be killed and humiliated, Okonkwo took matters into his own hands and killed himself. In the book Things fall apart the main character Okonkwo ended up both losing and winning at the end. He lost in the sense of the new religion, and government, and basically just the overall change ended up winning over tradition.

Which was what he feared all along. But in a sense he won because the last thing he did before he died was something he completely believed was the right thing to do, so he never gave up or stopped trying, even though he knows that he did all that he could and tried. But In the end it was just unbearable for him to live any longer with all that had changed in his village, so he did what he wanted to do, which was killing the messenger, then he killed himself. He killed himself because he understood that since he killed the messenger he was then going to be killed for the sin he had committed. But he he didn't want to be killed by someone else and be made as an example, and he didn't want to give the satisfaction to the District Of Commissioner by letting himself get killed by him. So in the end he just gave up and realized there was nothing else he could do about the situation at hand. “ The world has no end, and what is good among one people is an abomination with others” (* 11).

That shows that no matter that people will always see things differently, what is good or bad or what is right or what is wrong. No matter what, the world will never be agreeing on the matter at hand, there will always be fighting and arguing as long as there is something to be argued about. So in the end through all the fighting and heartache Okonkwo's death symbolized the tradition dying out and change taking over.