

# The depiction of culture clashes is no stranger

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The depiction of culture clashes is no stranger to literature, especially when it comes to the proliferation European religious values in order to better societies that are considered primitive. In the novel *Things Fall Apart*, by Chinua Achebe, just such a culture clash takes place, with the main character Okonkwo's village being overtaken by Christian white men seeking to convert his tribe. Though many people become convinced of the new religion's authenticity over time, Okonkwo is an inflexible warrior at heart, and his refusal to accept the changes taking place in his community serves to further exacerbate the point of the novel- that things that were once familiar always fall apart in the end.

Okonkwo's village, Umuofia, is one of a group of nine villages in Nigeria, and their isolation even from each other shows how far cut off they are from the rest of the world. However, the Ibo people who live there still have a very strong culture, consulting the Oracle for advice and having "egwugwu" (people dressed up as ancestral spirits) preside over trials.

Okonkwo is very comfortable in this environment, and is highly esteemed among his fellows for his strength in wrestling and his always plentiful yam harvests. He's happy with where he is in life, but of course, it's doomed not to last.

Soon, white Christian missionaries begin to invade Umuofia and surrounding villages, and the people don't know how to respond. At first, they take it as a joke, allowing the foreigners to build churches and seek converts, but when these endeavors soon become successful, the people of Umuofia don't know what to believe anymore. Some buy into the new religion, while others scorn

it and call to drive the foreigners out. No one supports the latter option more than Okonkwo, who laments that the men are all turning into women, and that they need to stand up for their traditional tribal beliefs over these alien ideas, reflecting that he sees the clan “breaking up and falling apart” (Achebe 183). His strong, unflinching nature comes out clearly in this struggle, as he fights to preserve his way of life even when all his peers are giving way to the pressure of the white man’s religion.

Finally, Okonkwo’s aggressive ideas begin to gain favor with the men of the village, and they band together and burn down the new church. This leads to a tense situation where war trembles on the tips of Umuofia’s fingers, but when Okonkwo strikes the first blow, they back away. It is then, as he’s looking down at the man he’s just killed, that “he knew that Umuofia would not go to war. . . They had broken into tumult instead of action” (Achebe 205). Okonkwo then goes on to hang himself because he knows that Christianity and the white men have won out over his will, and he can’t stand the idea of living in a society where their ideas preside.

This cultural collision of traditional tribal values and the spread of Christianity serves as a catalyst for Okonkwo’s world falling apart, which is a major theme in the novel. As much as he tries to keep his life the way it always has been, everything inescapably falls apart in the end, and eventually leads to Okonkwo’s suicide. The novel ends with the suggestion that the new religion now has a more powerful hold over the tribe, showing the white priests taking down Okonkwo’s body from the tree, the last resistance dying away with him.