

# Motherland (uchendu's passage)



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

The text in question is ' Things Fall Apart', written by Chinua Achebe. The main character of the text is Okonkwo, a man who falls from grace to grass. The passage in question is one of the initial parts of the second part of the book Things fall Apart. This is a speech given to Okonkwo by his uncle Uchendu in exile. Okonkwo has risen from obscurity and ignominy of a lazy cowardly father to become one of the lords of his father's clan Umuofia. Okonkwo is exiled from his father's clan because of killing a fellow kinsman. Okonkwo escapes from death, since he commits the female kind of abomination, as he killed the kinsman inadvertently. He, therefore, has to flee to his mother country, according to the tradition, in order to escape from the wrath of the earth goddess for killing a fellow clansman.

This is a part of the text in which Okonkwo and his family are given the first speech by his uncle Uchendu, in order to lift his spirits, which were weighed down by what he deemed as his unlucky fortune. Okonkwo has risen to the highest levels of the clan by his own hard work and persistence, and as such, the calamity that has befallen him weighs down on him. He deems himself to be the most unfortunate man on the planet, since his will was against his prosperity. Uchendu Okonkwo's uncle intends to put Okonkwo's situation into the context with what other people have experienced, including what he has gone through, because of the traditions of the land and the clan (Okpewho 88-90). The speech is given by Uchendu soon after the arrival of Okonkwo, who has observed to be withdrawn and having no heart for living and working. Uchendu, thus, uses the instance of Okonkwo's banishment, in order to come up with a philosophical argument while relating it to Okonkwo's exile.

Uchendu's speech is intended to give back Okonkwo his vigor and desire for life, which he has lost. This speech, thus, places in context the life of Okonkwo and how he comes to terms with his exile. It sets the tone for Okonkwo's adaptation to life in exile, and how he manages to turn his sorrow into a success, even as he is in exile. This is a speech, which is deemed to be important in the context of continuing the story, since it is given as an incentive to the main character of the story. This speech also puts in context Okonkwo's situation and informs the reader of the change that had happened in his life. After this speech, Okonkwo goes ahead to embrace his terms of exile, albeit grudgingly (Booker 75). He goes on to become successful, even in his mother's homeland, while he yet longs for his fatherland Umuofia. This passage prepares the reader for the coming changes in the clan, not only in terms of traditional observances, but also in terms of unforeseen circumstances, which will affect the life of Okonkwo. The speech places Uchendu as an authoritative figure, who is influential in determining the life of Okonkwo's life in exile after this incident.

Okonkwo's banishment exiles him to his motherland, where he deals negatively with his misfortune. Okonkwo is obsessed with a need to be different from his father in being successful and prosperous, as opposed to his father. In this regard, when he arrives in his motherland, he exhibits despair, since he deems his chi to be against his ascendancy in the clan. This despair and lack of drive and desire, for living is taken to be a lack of gratitude to his mother's kinsmen, and as such, it leads to the speech by Uchendu. The banishment upsets Okonkwo, since he deems his mother's clan as a womanly clan, as compared to Umuofia. Okonkwo has, therefore,

refused to come to terms with the feminine side, which every man possesses (Egar 134-44). Uchendu's speech, thus, has grave meaning in that it attempts to make Okonkwo embrace his feminine side.

This speech is laden with meaning not only from a cultural perspective, but also from philosophical one. The speech gives a lot of meaning to the circumstances of Okonkwo's life in exile by contrasting it with the life of other sufferer and Uchendu. The speech echoes Unoka's words to Okonkwo's ones, with regard to failing alone, which Uchendu now revisits. Uchendu tells of the loss of his five wives, which openly portrays the strong attachment he had to his wives who have borne him children and shared his life. Thus, it is evident when he says that he only has left as wife a young girl, who does not differentiate her left hand from her right hand. This is indicative that aspects of beauty, youth and sexual attractiveness are not the only things of value in life (Ogbaa 67-78). The meaning of this is that, even as Okonkwo has lost most of what he had, this is not a death sentence. Okonkwo has a chance to rebuild his life, and as such, should stop feeling sorry for him.

This speech is also intended to bring out the importance of women in Igbo society. Okonkwo has been banished to his motherland for an inadvertent crime he commits against a clansman. This is compared to the instance of a child, who is beaten by its father, who then runs to its mother for comfort. According to Uchendu, the child seeks to refuse from the mother, when times are hard, yet finds comfort with the mother in hard times. The father punishes and does not console, hence, the risk of total despair and death is truly real with the father. The mother, on the other hand, offers protection and consolation, when the father throws the child out. The mother is,

therefore, supreme in that she ensures the survival of the child and, hence, of the society (Booker 324-31). Ucherndu also works philosophically by asserting that Okonkwo is not the greatest sufferer in the world, since other people have suffered even worse. This is intended to make Okonkwo deal not only with his current predicament, but also with unavoidable future situations, which may be unfavorable.

This speech is significant to tthe whole work, since it serves not only as a bridge to the two parts of the book, but is also a lesson in Igbo culture and tradition. The banishment of Okonkwo marks the start of things falling apart for Okonkwo, which culminates in the falling apart not only of Okonkwo's life, but also of the whole clan (Okpewho 112-119). This speech that is given by Uchendu is, thus, of great significance in setting the tone for the impending happenings in the latter part of the book. Uchendu talks of losing wives and children and Okonkwo goes ahead to lose Nwoye to the missionaries. The speech is significant in that it offers a voice of reason to Okonkwo who, until this time, has been portrayed as an independent and fierce person, who listened to no one. This is a speech, which is particularly significant, since it also paints Uchendu as a foil character to Okonkwo. Uchendu is portrayed as being reasonable and cool-headed, even as Okonkwo is hard-headed and stubborn.

Since Okonkwo is placed under the care of his mother's clan and Uchendu, this is a reflection of attitudes towards womanhood. Okonkwo has all along looked down upon women in general and has deemed his mother's clan to be effeminate. This speech is, thus, significant in that it intends to set the record with regards to the perception of women in Igbo's society. Uchendu is

<https://assignbuster.com/motherland-uchendus-passage/>

extremely strong in asserting that the woman plays a particularly significant role in the society as a comforter and protector (Egar 152-8). It is also not lost on the audience that this speech is intended to portray the true nature of the Igbo man, as opposed to what had been propagated before. According to Uchendu, a man is not only the sum of his wealth, possession, wives or children, but also other things, such as wisdom and self control. This is contrasted with the first part of the book, where Okonkwo is portrayed as the ultimate Igbo man, since he is fierce, rich and bold, even as he lacks self control.

This speech is also of significance to the rest of the text, as it sets the tone for the last part of the book, in which Okonkwo sees his whole life falling apart. The speech is like a prediction of the things, which are going to happen to Okonkwo. It is particularly surprising that, while Okonkwo is always determined to portray himself as the bold and fierce warrior, he decides to end his life. This part is also significant in that it enhances the portrayal of Okonkwo in that it ensures that he alters his attitude towards his motherland and life. The author, however, asserts that Okonkwo has a desire for success and influence, which is a tragic flaw. This is finally shown, when he ultimately takes on the white man by killing a court messenger (Ogbaa 187-192). While it may seem that the speech by Uchendu changes his attitude, it has actually never changed. Okonkwo remained the same with his true character underneath for the time he spent in exile. His violence and desire to be deemed strong and a lack of self control came out when he returned to his clan in Umuofia.