Culture in Things Fall Apart

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In as much as change is in evitable, cultural changes causes conflicts and clashes among different people especially when it is un expected making it difficult to embrace. In Chinua Achebe’s novel *Things Fall Apart,* cultural argument is evident as the author narrates the tale set in Umuofia village where the missionaries came to peaceful communities to impose their beliefs, religions and introduce a new system of learning. The missionaries believed that they brought a meaningful religion and better education system while the people of Umuofia were adamant about changing and leaving their practices which had for long guided the community. Since there was no better way to introduce new methods while discerning their fundamental beliefs, several frictions and culture clash took a better part of the novel. Okonkwo had a quest in ensuring that the natives stick to their cultural values, but, his efforts were unsuccessful as the Europeans managed to convert the natives. More casualties to the cultural interaction emerged as Chinua Achebe uses various cultural scenarios to justify the title*Things Fall Apart*.

The culture of foreigners and people of Igbo makes things to fall apart. The Europeans invadingpeople of Igbo and imposing new ideas upon them clearly did not augur well with most of them (Avoseh, 2009). As a result, Okonkwo who wanted fame came out strongly to physically oppose their ideas. In this instance, it is the European belief that their culture is dominant and worth practice that gave the story its title as it caused things to fall out of control. As a result, the disrespect and ignorance that the Europeans had towards the Igbo culture is the genesis of the entire quagmire (Bloom, 2009). The destruction of the traditional religions and governance including the fundamental beliefs explains the cause of disagreements. Generally, the cultural differences reveal the foundation upon which the novel is built and the idea upon which the heading is driven.

The missionaries introduced Christianity at Umuofia. When the Europeans first introduced their religion, it was optional and attending church was entirely at will for everyone. However, with time, they became too aggressive and forced their faith on the natives. The Europeans became more judgmental to the people of Igbo and their traditional practices as well as religious beliefs. It is witnessed when they constantly undermine them by reminding the natives that their gods are “not gods at all” (Chinua, 1958 pg.135) adding that their gods are mere "wood and stone" (Chinua, 1958 pg.136). Generally, this shows that by degrading one culture, the other had to rise to protect their clan and Okonkwo resolved to violence in the better part of the novel making things to fall part hence giving the book title and themes the relevance.

The members of the society felt that their clan was dying. Okonkwo upon returning to Umuofia, after comingfrom his uncle where he took refuge, was astonished to find that the missionaries had converted some people into their Christianity and some of the children were forced to attend the missionary schools. Since Okonkwo did not like the idea, he thought that the clan was losing its glory and ability to protect itself and independence, the fact that made him demand war to drive away the missionaries who were invading their territory (Avoseh, 2009). Clearly, this chapter shows that it’s the native’s cultural practice that triggered the disagreement. The need to protect the community and its culture as most people believed that the introduction of the new religions and doing away with their culture will kill the clan. Many people opposed the introduction of new governance citing that it caused the death of a once united clan with solid practices and with admirable cultural beliefs (Chinua, 1958). Clearly, over protection of culture and being too conscious and protective to the culture explains why the war and disagreement emerged.

Okonkwo was possessed with preserving the dignity of the clan. The main protagonist resolves to war in ensuring that the Europeans do not interfere with their traditions and beliefs. The character was bitter as the coming of white men did to him more harm than good. He lost his son who converted to Christianity, and he suddenly lost his fame and glory as he was not given a proper homecoming (Chinua, 1958). The war on supremacy and seeking revenge for the white men's interference led Okonkwo to commence war on the whites. In a meeting arranged by the district commissioner, he strikes men with a hatchet as others flee. Generally, the things began to fall apart following the sudden change that the native was not willing to uphold. Clearly Okonkwo wanted to protect his personal interest as he had mastered how to excel in the traditional culture and could not entertain any new invasion that would render him worthless.

The introduction of Christianity trimmed the power of Igbo that it had over the rest of the clans. The conflict and war on supremacy among the families and African communities seemed to end as the introduction of a new culture by the missionaries took over (Shea, 2008). Christianity came with new rules. It both came to limit the war as well as supporting it when necessary. The clash, desire to show supremacy, and need to maintain various cultural beliefs and practices explain the real meaning and reasons why the culture of multiple individuals clashed making things fall apart (Shea, 2008). It is true that the fight for interests and need to maintain the Umuofia’s supremacy as it was feared by the neighboring as “powerful in war” (Chinua, 1958 pg. 15), led to the setting and plotting of the entire tale.

Unoka was lazy and did not like working. However, unlike his father, Okonkwo became vigilant and worked extremely hard to surpass his father. He hated lazy men and wanted to become the exact opposite of his father, and the only way he could be that was to hate everything that his father loved (Shea, 2008). At a young age, Okonkwo was already famous and commanded deep respect from all the nine communities due to the inter-clan wars and when he threw and defeated Amalinze the Cat (Chinua, 1957 pg. 1). The coming of white men is seen as the main cause and reason for the death of Okonkwo. The tragedy that came as a result of a cultural clash. The community lost its hero, from depression and anger that he could not control. Clearly, there is a cultural conflict between the people of Igbo. As long as someone works hard and becomes wealthy, they automatically elevate to social power as Okonkwo becomes too proud that perhaps defines his downfall.

Okonkwo becomes obsessed with his success and Masculinity. This is evident by the fact that any tender emotions towards the feminism make him overreact to the female. In a meeting, he called a fellow man who tried to interrupt his session a woman. He said without looking at him “This meeting is for men” (Chinua, 1958). In addition,Okonkwo thoroughly beats up his wife, Ojiugo, because she left the home compound without cooking for him. When the act is cited as going against the peace and serenity which the society is expected since the community had a ‘peace week’, he became unapologetic but paid the fines he was taxed anyway. It is this pride that led to his downfall (Bloom, 2009). Inability to control his anger, adamancy in accepting changes and agreed to maintain his fame and social power among the people of Igbo that was altered with by the missionaries led him to grow wild, become angry and later led to his failure and finally death. “When did you become a shivering old woman, you, who are known in all nine villages for your valor in war” (Chinua, 1958 pg. 56). Okonkwo started feeling unsafe that his popularity and fame could be fading away.

Generally, the natives' cultural practices led to the falling apart of things. In the same manner, the European culture came along with various diversity and attempt to impose new religion and traditions to people that made the people feel intimidated and less valued (Avoseh, 2009). The practice equally led to the emergence of a new type of war while threatening the peace of the community members who thought that the white men overpowered them and took their clan. Need to maintain safety, the fight to protect society and need to instill better practices describe the title of the novel. Therefore, lack of proper understanding and need to know that everyone valued their practice led to the conflict and hence story line.

Okonkwo failed in his quest for leadership in his village. He worked hard to build himself by becoming famous and socially wealthy. In as much as his farther failed, he became successful by yielding much yams and wining several wars. Yet, Okonkwo killed himself when he returned from his mother’s homeland and found that the missionaries had changed almost everything in his society (Bloom, 2009). To him, the clan was no longer a residence of warriors and when the rest of the people refused to stand against the white men, he opts to commit suicide. A tragic ending that was caused by the white’s culture to Igbo’s warrior making things fall apart.

In conclusion, Chinua Achebe presents unbiased stance of a novel where both the culture that is in the novel have flaws. It is through the culture that the book receives its entire relevance and flow. The reader is left to analyze all the instances as both have a better and dark side. The people of Igbo are very adamant and strive to maintain their culture while the missionaries feel that the culture of the people of Igbo is ignorant and deserves to be discarded immediately. Due to the clash, a great threat to peace and a rift between these two groups helps the author to develop the setting of the tale and hence gives the title of the novel Things Fall Apart meaning. The people of Umuofia taste defeat due to their lack of unity. Some of them became easily converted to Christianity and believes in the culture of the missionaries as they adopted their form of governance while the rest resisted. On the other hand, the ministers were too insensitive. Invading into others territory and trying to impose in them some form of religion and practices which they never believed as much as they sounded better and excellent.

References

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