

The Culture of Things Fall Apart vs. Western Culture

Many societies have beliefs embedded deep in their early religion. Some beliefs include polygamy, polytheism and patriarchy. This culture is such of the 'Ibo' culture in 'Things Fall Apart'. Polytheism and polygamy are custom in the tribe, and the role of each family member is very defined. The men are dominant. The women and children are treated poorly and often beaten. Life in Okonkwo's tribe Umuofia would seem very different to someone living in modern day society.

One custom of Umuofia that is very different from Western culture is Polygamy, marrying more than one person. This custom is practiced through-out the nine villages of Umuofia. Actually a man's wealth is partly measured by the number of wives he has. A wealthy man described in 'Things Fall Apart', had nine wives and thirty children. Okonkwo has three wives and eight children.

Polygamy is not something many people are accustomed to. Western culture teaches that monogamy, as opposed to polygamy, is the proper, accepted form of marriage. In Western culture, having more than one partner in a marriage is often cause for divorce; however, in Umuofia it is practiced and even encouraged by most of its people.

Another common belief in Umuofia is Polytheism, the worship or belief in many gods. Included in their practice of polytheism is their chi, or personal god. "A man could not rise beyond the destiny of his chi". The book goes on to say, "Unoka was an ill-fated man. He had a bad chi, or personal god, and evil fortune followed him to the grave...". Achebe expresses that this is a god of great importance that foretells a person's future. In the Ibo culture it is custom to make sacrifices to the gods, like Unoka in Achebe's novel tells, "Every year... before I put any crop in the earth, I sacrifice A cock to Ani, the owner of all land. I also kill a cock at the shrine of Ifejioku, the god of yams". This shows the importance of ritual, and religion in Ibo society. Okonkwo believed he was successful because he sacrificed a few roosters, not because he planted good crops.

Western culture does not practice the ritual of sacrifice; most western religions look down upon living sacrifices. Western religions have never sacrificed animals to their gods. In most countries, killing an animal sacrificially would violate animal cruelty laws, which would make animal sacrifices illegal.

The men and women of the village hold very set places and positions in the society. In Umuofia, men are considered the rulers and leaders of the village; and just like all patriarchies, the women are viewed as objects. One example of an Umuofian male protagonist is Okonkwo. Okonkwo had done well in his life and earned a leading role in Umuofia; he had three wives with many children, and was a successful farmer of yams. Yams were important because they "stood for manliness, and he who could feed his family from one harvest to another was a very great man indeed". This would show that the people of Umuofia felt that as long as a man could feed his family with plenty, he was successful as the head of the family, and a leader of the tribe. As long as Okonkwo showed the qualities of a

man: strength, courage, and wealth; he could not be challenged by someone of lesser position. In one village meeting a man contradicted Okonkwo. "Without looking at the man Okonkwo had said: 'This meeting is for men.' The man who had contradicted him had no titles. That was why he had called him a woman. "Okonkwo knew how to kill a man's spirit". This shows that Okonkwo knew that calling a man a woman would break his feelings of self-worth and value. Okonkwo's comment also seems to show that all men in Umuofia would be insulted if they were called women. Most of the men of Umuofia seem to hold the same ideals that Okonkwo has, that women were placed here to be objects and trophies, not for companionship and comfort.

Also in 'Things Fall Apart' it talks about beating women. Beating women in this culture is considered to show a sign of strength and manliness. Western culture will no longer accept any type of beating. Laws state that no one can be beaten, prisoners are not even allowed to be beaten. Women are quickly becoming viewed more like men. Western society has slowly but surely incorporated women in the work place and raised the standard of equality. Such actions would never be allowed in Umuofia.

Achebe goes on to talk about Umuofia's most powerful being, the earth goddess. The fact that the ruler of life, Ani, is female this shows a great contradiction in Okonkwo's beliefs. Okonkwo's idea of manliness is different from that of the tribe. Okonkwo feels masculinity is anger and aggression, and that is often the only way he acts. Okonkwo feels that showing any other emotion would be considered weak.

Achebe's 'Things Fall Apart' brings to light the great cultural differences found in Western society and the Ibo culture. Most of the differences in the religion, and the role of the male and female in Umuofia would not be easily accepted here in Western culture.