

English

What impressions do you get of 19th century Ibo society from your reading so far?

As I read along the stories, I feel like I am also part of the Ibo as I follow the day-to-day activities. Here are the impressions I get of 19th century Ibo society from reading part one of the book--- Things Fall Apart.

In Things Fall Apart, Chinua Achebe carefully describes most Ibo cultural traditions and beliefs in detail. And the Ibo culture varied from clan to clan and was lively and dynamic. We can see the different Ibo culture by looking at one of the examples--the "ozo titles". In Umuofia—the clan which Okonkwo lives, ozo title is held in high esteem, for instance, a man of title is forbidden to climb the palm tree, whilst in other clans, such as Abame and Aninta, the ozo title is so low that even a beggar can take it.

The Ibo villagers have a strong faith and beliefs towards Ibo gods. They sacrifice things to Ani, the owner of all land; to Ifejioku, the god of yams before they crop on the land. The villagers do not allow any kind of carelessness with their customs. For example, when Okonkwo beats his wife during the Month of Peace, the clan believes that Okonkwo has insulted the earth goddess and that may lead to the perishing of the whole clan. Okonkwo is reprimanded for that. But there is an exception, during the wrestling contest, people lose their inhibitions and actually enjoy themselves.

In Ibo society, people set up status and ranks by hardworking rather than inherit the wealth from their fathers. Okonkwo's father, Unoka, who Okonkwo viewed as a failure, was an improvident loafer. He did not leave any barns of yam for his children. But Okonkwo did not become a failure; he achieved success by his hard work and got an ozo title. In order to prove his ability, he had overthrown the greatest wrestler in nine villages. This indicates that in Ibo society, a man was judged according to his worth and not according to the worth of his father.

The "Ibo Oracles"--- Agbala is sacred. People go to consult it when they have problems or confusions. Both Agbala and Chielo, the priestess of Agbala are women. Their power and status in Umuofia suggest that women's role in Ibo culture are important. Unlike many other countries where women have nearly no powers, status and rights, women in Ibo culture are treated equally as men.

Moon has an important influence to the Ibos. It is not only a measure of time, but also the only source of light at nights. The night is quiet except on moonlight nights. People fear of evil spirits and dangerous animals. They never call the name of snakes, but call them strings. But on moonlight nights, the atmosphere is totally different; it is filled with happy voices. This shows that moon is acting like a light; it brings people the bright ways.

The main crop in Umuofia is yams and kola nuts. These are acting as money in Umuofia. Yams represent the wealth of a man. Okonkwo started his farming by sharecropping, although it is a very slow way of building up a barn, because after all the hard work, one only gets a third of the harvests. But if one wants to get rich, the best way to achieve the aim is to grow crops initially by sharecropping.

Ibo society has a polygamous culture, men may take more than one wife and each household is enclosed into a compound. Each wife lives with her children in a hut whilst the husband has his own hut. The husband will visit each wife in turn. A man with many wives is also considered as a successful man, because he has the ability to feed a large family.

People are superstitious about lots of unexplained things. In 19th century, there was hardly any development in the country. As a result, child mortality rates were high due to poor hygiene. Many children die in the early childhood. If a series of such deaths took place in an Ibo family, people believed that the same wicked spirit was being born and dying for many times, grieving their parents.