

The culture of the Umuofia society before the colonial infiltration, may be hard to understand but we are forced by Achebe to realize it has traditions and customs that make it work. Although, looking at it from our Judaeo-Christian point of view we may be appalled by some of their practices. We also have to realize that they have strengths.

Things Fall apart is the idea of balance and interdependence, earth and sky, individual and community, man and woman or different perspectives on the same situation. The central image of this balance is contained in the Ibo concept of "chi," which occurs throughout the novel. A person's "chi" is their destiny, his inner self, "you wouldn't challenge your "chi" to a wrestling match," as did Okonkwo when he assisted in the killing of Ikemefuna, whom he loved and who called him father. Okonkwo sins not only against the earth goddess, protector of family relations, but also against his inner most feelings or his "chi." Any bad luck that occurs, people of this culture would say that you have a bad "chi."

Okonkwo's destiny is marked by bad luck, one reason may be that he is so driven by the fear of resembling his father that he struggles to repress part of his personality with predictably afflicted results.

This was a society where a man was judged by his own achievement and not that of his fathers. Yams were the primary crop of Umuofia. A sign of manliness was if you could farm yams to feed your family. Okonkwo is respected because of his hard work.

The complex patterns of Umuofia's economic and social customs materialize throughout this novel as we see Okonkwo compelled to rid himself of any similarities that his father had. Unoka had no titles, was lazy and when he died was greatly in debt.

Some may wonder how a society like the Ibo's functioned, how they enforce its laws with no kings, no organized police force, and no standing army. Indeed this is something our "modern" culture could study. These things were accomplished through the functions of the masked spirits.

The Egwugwu, represents the village's highest spiritual and judicial authority. The masked spirits are believed to represent their ancestors. This supports the myth "The land of the living was not far removed from the domain of the ancestors." There was a coming and going between them, especially at festivals and also when an old man died because an old man was very close to the ancestors, as we saw when Ezeudu died. "A man's life from birth to death was a series of transitional rites which brought him nearer and nearer to his ancestors."

The Egwugwu is made up of the "titled" men of the village, they have legal, moral and religious authority. They have a working system of peace and order. This is demonstrated by the trial of Uzowulu for beating his wife.

They had a sense of community, the week of peace came at the end of the carefree season and before the harvest and planting season. During the week of peace "Okonkwo broke the peace and was punished, as was the custom, by Ezeani, the priest of the earth goddess." He told Okonkwo, even though his wife was at fault, he committed a great evil. During the Week of Peace you are to live in complete peace no matter what

the circumstances, "the evil he did could ruin the whole clan."

The feast of the New Yam is similar to our Thanksgiving, it was held every year before the harvest began, to honor the earth goddess and the ancestral spirits of the clan. The second day of the new year was the day of the great wrestling match between Okonkwo's village and their neighbors. Okonkwo's second wife Ekwefi, loved this festival. Many years ago when she was the village beauty, Okonkwo had won her heart by throwing the Cat in the greatest contest. She did not marry him then because he could not afford her bride price. In this culture they bargained over a bride price in Ekwefi's case it had been a cow, being a symbol of wealth which he repaid to her first husband after she ran away to be with Okonkwo.

Through the marriage of Obierka's daughter we see traditions of their weddings. The wedding was really a woman's ceremony, the central figures, just as in our culture were the bride and her mother. The celebration of Uri, which is the day preceding the wedding, everyone is invited. On this day the bride's suitor brings palm-wine, not only for the bride's parents and immediate relatives but also for the wide group of kinsmen.

The bride and her mother go around in a circle shaking hands with all the guests. The bride's father then presents Kola-nuts to his in-laws, (Kola-nuts signifies hospitality) he tells them he is giving them his daughter and that she will be a good wife.

They eat and drink all day, it was a great celebration and at night they all danced.

Myths represent a person's perception of the deepest truth about nature. Myths and legends had a two-fold purpose to provide and explain history and beliefs of the Ibo people, while at the same time to show the rise and fall of Okonkwo and his culture. They did this through stories such as The Birds and the Tortoise. The Tortoise is the story of the sudden rise and fall of Tortoise, just as Things Fall Apart is the story of the rise and fall of Okonkwo and his clan. The story says that the birds lent the tortoise their feathers so he could accompany them to the sky. Okonkwo was treated with great honor and respect, just as the birds took the tortoise "as the king of the birds." After Okonkwo was elevated to the membership of the greatest decision making body in the land, he is exiled to Mbanta, abandoned even by his closest friends who took a part in destroying his home. After the Tortoise is brought to the highest place in the sky, there he is abandoned by all the birds, his former friends. The Tortoise sends words to his wife to arrange for his survival. This is the same for Okonkwo's flight to his maternal land and he turns to his family for survival. The tale tells us that the Tortoise's wife was misinstructed and "he fell and his shell broke into pieces." This reflects Okonkwo's return from exile only to find Umuofia "breaking up and falling apart." The tale says that a great medicine man gathered all the bits of shell and stuck them together to give the tortoise his tough skin. After Okonkwo's suicide, the tribe, though broken, was held together and stuck together. The Tortoise survives, a patchwork of himself, just as Ibo clanship survives. The simple tale of the birds and the tortoise is the outline of the whole novel. These stories are told as entertainment, however they pass along belief about themselves.

There are many weaknesses in this society as in all societies the superstitions, on dark nights the children were

warned not even to whistle for fear of evil spirits were near. A snake was called a string because they feared that it could hear.

The week of peace has no rational connection with the success of crops.

The cruelty of the killing of newborn twins, they are left in the wilderness to die. The murder of Ikemefuna had no rational reasoning.

This society has no tolerance for people who are different, or don't conform such as Nwoye, Okonkwo's son, he doesn't fit in and therefore is rejected turning only to Christianity.

Achebe wrote this novel after reading Joyce Cary's Mister Johnson, he was outraged by the way Africans were perceived, he wrote this novel from "the inside." He wanted to communicate to the world that African societies were not mindless or barbaric, and that the colonial infiltration disturbed the unity and the balance of what was once a very dignified society and he did.