

Farming and Homebuilding (Brian Rhee)

Igbo Tribe Farming

In the Igbo tribe, landowners lacked the money to pay farm workers. Therefore, they followed a system called the share-cropping. This system allowed dividing crops into three shares: one for the landowner, one for the worker, and one for whoever provided the seeds, fertilizers, and farm equipments used for the farming process. The shared cropped includes corn, yams, and beans. The Igbo tribe prepared the fields using hoes and machetes.

“Every year,” he said sadly, “before I put any crop in the earth, I sacrifice a cock to Ani, the owner of all land. It is the law of our fathers. I also kill a cock at the shrine of Ifejioku, the god of yams. I clear the bush and set fire to it when it is dry. I sow the yams when the first rain has fallen, and stake them when the young tendrils appear...”

Ani is believed to be the god of Earth in the Igbo tribe. People prayed to Ani for advice on harvesting, and made sacrifices for a good season.

Igbo Tribe Homebuilding

The traditional houses built by Igbo people were mainly made from mud, timber, and palm stems (used for walls and roof support). The most well-known type of house was the Mbari. Mbari houses were found among Igbo communities and were also used as shrines dedicated to the gods they worshipped. The Mbari was built in a square foundation with an additional small story above the ground floor. The ground floor was usually filled with statues and drawings of women, men, children, animals, mythical creatures and deities.

Athletics and Entertainment (Jimmy Yuh)

Igbo Traditional Wrestling & Entertainment

In Igbo culture, wrestling is one of the primary forms of entertainment. Wrestling tournaments were contests of strength and skill and gave one the opportunity to distinguish him or herself in his or her village. Acclaimed wrestlers earned the respect and admiration of those in their communities.

And while wrestling is a popular form of entertainment, it is not just used for amusement. For example, wrestling can be used to settle upon a prospective suitor for a girl. In such a case, a tournament may be formed, and the victorious wrestler wins the girl's hand in marriage. In addition, inter-village wrestling competitions were (and still are) quite common. Each village has its own wrestling area and during competition, wrestlers are grouped according to their ability. Spectators circle the wrestlers to form a ring and the competition begins between with the two primary wrestlers from the two villages.

It should be noted that wrestling was not just limited to men in Igbo culture: women often participated as well. There were a number of occasions in which women wrestled, such as Mgba Akpukpa and Ocho. Mgba Akpukpa is a contest that literally translates to “maize” and occurs during July and August when maize is primarily eaten. From young girls to soon-to-be brides, women of all ages participated in this event.

Music

Another popular form of entertainment was Igbo music which is often characterized as being lively and upbeat. Typically, traditional music was used in celebrations (e.g. weddings), sacred rituals (e.g. funerals), and for sports and labor. The drum was the most important instrument used by the Igbo and was widely used at events. The Udu drum, otherwise known as the talking drum, is the most popular form of drum among the Igbo as it is applicable to a vast array of events.

Daily Life and Marriage (Ana Villarreal)

Daily Life

The Ibo people live in collections of villages that form a clan. They can have anywhere from a couple hundred to a few thousand habitants. In the novel, nine villages form the clan of Umuofia.

The villages are not ruled by a king or designated leader. Old men and men who have taken titles lead the villages together, they are the most respected figures in the Ibo society. However when decisions are made, they include almost everyone’s opinion. Titles must be paid for, thus money is equivalent to social standing in the village. Men that have taken titles wear anklets to indicate. Old or respected men dress up as the spirits of the nine villages and the dark forest; they are called *egwugwu*. They hold maximum in authority in settling disputes in the clan.

“Ezeudu had taken three titles in his life. It was a rare achievement. There were only four titles in the clan, and only one or two men in any generation ever achieved the fourth and highest.”

Men who have taken no titles are called *agbala*, which is also a word for woman. Feminine qualities are seen as negative and men tend to mock them. In the novel, Okonkwo is pleased whenever his son demonstrates this kind of behavior, mocking the vanities of women.

People live in family compounds. The main hut belongs to the head of the family and is called *obi*. In addition, each wife has their own hut where she lives with her children. Male children spend most of their time with their mothers until they become teenagers, which is when their father calls them to his *obi* for company.

“So Okonkwo encouraged the boys to sit with him in his obi, and he told them stories of the land-- masculine stories of violence and bloodshed. Nwoye knew that it was right to be masculine and to be violent, but somehow he still preferred the stories that his mother used to tell...”

The main crops of the tribe are yams. Men cultivate the land during the farming season and then rest for the remaining time. Women make different foods with yams. And as a custom, all of a man's wives must cook him a dish for dinner, which is brought to the men by their children.

“During the planting season Okonkwo worked daily on his farms from cock-crow until the chickens went to roost. He was a very strong man and rarely felt fatigue.”

Marriage

Practice of Polygamy: Men have multiple wives. A man can only marry as many women as he can provide for, which is why poor men often marry only once. In the novel, Okonkwo's father had only one wife because he was poor and owed everyone money. Okonkwo on the contrary is a respected wealthy man who has three wife and many kids.

When a man wants to marry a woman it is the custom to negotiate a bride price. In the novel it is paid in cowries (a kind of shell used as a form of currency). Bride prices are negotiated, in the novel it is done with sticks. In Okonkwo's village it is seen as bad a bad custom to bargain for a woman's bride-price as if she were a piece of merchandise like it is done in other clans.

After a suitor finished paying a woman's family the established amount, a great party for the whole village is held in celebration of their marriage. The suitor's family must present a number of pots of wine and the bride's family often gifts an animal to the suitor's family. If a woman runs away from her husband, the woman's family is required to give back the money he 'paid' for her.

“Obierika, was celebrating his daughter's uri. It was the day on which her suitor (having already paid the greater part of her bride-price) would bring palm- wine not only to her parents and immediate relatives but to the wide and extensive group of kinsmen called umunna. Everybody had been invited--men, women and children. But it was really a woman's ceremony and the central figures were the bride and her mother.”

Gender Roles and Children (Michelle Sohn)

Gender Roles

The Igbo people were very sensitive to gender and the binary roles that came with them. In Igbo society, expectations for men and women were clear-cut. Men were expected to be fierce and bold, while women were expected to be docile and maternal. The tight patriarchal power structure meant that men dominated society in almost every way. They held leadership positions and were given more privileges than their counterparts, such as the right to polygamy. Women were valued but were also seen as controllable, as depicted by Okonkwo's relationship with his wife in the novel. Wives acquired more and more respect from her elders as she grew older and it was expected of her to give birth to sons, to continue the heritage and secure her place in the family. Although a woman's place in Igbo society was domestically oriented, many women also engaged in craftmaking and farming.

In traditional Igbo culture, women were regarded as complimentary to men. For example, the women would plant other crops such as maize while the men harvested the yams, as they were seen as the "king of crops" and were a determining factor of wealth. Although there were clear disadvantages to women, paradoxically, many of them enjoyed being provided for and complied to the female gender roles that had been reinforced within the group for years. As these expectations had been accepted as tradition, gender roles and stereotypes were internalized to the point where the men and women rarely butted heads over what had become social norms.

Children

Male and female babies were welcomed very differently into the world during traditional Igbo times. Baby boys were met with joy, especially from the father, as he would have someone to take his place down the line. Fathers were ambivalent towards girls, and many consecutive daughters without a son would be something to grieve. Children also frequently died young due to environmental factors.

"I think she (Enzima) will stay. They usually stay if they do not die before the age of six."

From a young age, girls and boys are raised according to Igbo gender norms. Girls are taught to be sensitive, gentle, and submissive to prepare them for their role as women in society. Boyishness is frowned upon. For example, Enzima is scolded for sitting cross-legged, "like a boy." On the other contrary, boys are taught to be courageous and ferocious, and any trace of femininity was unacceptable, as demonstrated by Okonkwo, who literally beat the femininity out of Nwoye. Fathers would tell young boys violent stories of bloodshed in hopes of toughening them up.

Works Cited

Achebe, Chinua. *Things Fall Apart*. New York: Anchor, 1994. Print.

"Ibos People." *Africa Guide*. N.p., n.d. Web. 01 Feb. 2015.

Shmoop Editorial Team. "Things Fall Apart." *Shmoop.com*. Shmoop University, Inc., 11 Nov. 2008. Web. 05 Feb. 2015.

"Things Fall Apart By Chinua Achebe Study Help Full Glossary for Things Fall Apart." *Full Glossary for Things Fall Apart*. N.p., n.d. Web. 05 Feb. 2015.

"Gender-Sensitivity In Igbo Culture: A Philosophical Re-appraisal." *Goddy Ozumba* :. N.p., n.d. Web. 11 Feb. 2015.

Agbogun, James. "Wrestling: Igbo Traditional Wrestling." *The Nigeria*. NIGERIA, n.d. Web. 10 Feb. 2015.

"Ethnic Wrestling Forms." Traditional Wrestling of the Igbo People. LeVV, 11 Dec. 2012. Web. 10 Feb. 2015.

"Igbo Traditional Music and Musical Instruments." Nairaland. Oluwaseun Osewa, 11 Oct. 2013. Web. 10 Feb. 2015.

Questions

Farming and Homebuilding

1. To what extent was Okonkwo's power formed by his wrestling prowess?
2. Why was wrestling so popular as a form of entertainment?

Athletics and Entertainment

3. How can the unique systems used by the Igbo tribe help the farming process?
4. What significance does the structure of the houses have?

Daily life and marriage

5. How are the leaders of a village selected?
6. What gifts do families present each other when a man and woman marry?

Children and Gender roles

7. Explain how the relationship between Okonkwo and his wives reflect the gender norms of traditional Igbo culture.
8. How does Okonkwo project his violent nature onto his son and Ikemefuma?