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## Community Values In Things Fall Apart

Things Fall Apart, written by Nigerian author Chinua Achebe, was written in 1958. The novel's plot revolves around the clan of Umuofia, a culmination of nine villages on the lower Niger in Africa. The clan is quite powerful, populated, advanced, and skilled at war. Okonkwo, the main character, is praised among the Umuofians. He is the son of his effeminate father, Unoka, and strives throughout the book to model the opposite character traits. He is driven, brave, violent at times, and arrogant. Okonkwo's fatal flaw is that "his whole life was dominated by fear, the fear of failure and weakness." (Ch. 2). Throughout Things Fall Apart we see the community values placed on strength and masculinity, title and personal achievement, women's role in society, and symbolism.

The novel begins with Okonkwo, age eighteen, bringing honor to his village of Iguedo by defeating Amalinze the Cat in a wrestling match. It should be noted that the Cat, until this match, had been undefeated for seven years. Okonkwo's fearlessness, both in this scenario and throughout the plot, shows that this trait renders him as a "strong" figure in society. Achebe writes, "In Umuofia's latest war he was the first to bring home a human head". The second chapter goes into great detail the number of heads Okonkwo has brought back as a symbol of strength and dominance in war. One of the character's most pressing intentions in life is to show off to society to be seen as a symbol of strength. However, he is not fearless by nature, as made clear by the contrasts we see between him and his father. Unoka is portrayed as a weak, carefree, blood-fearing, art-loving, debt-accumulating disgrace to society. Okonkwo's opposition to his father's aforementioned traits left him hyper-masculine and a bit unbalanced. He demonstrated his disdain for femininity in how we treated women, particularly by way of physical and emotional violence. The starkest example of this is when Okonkwo was "provoked to justifiable anger" (Ch.4) to beat his second wife, Ojiugo during the sacred Week of Peace after she fails to return home on time to cook his lunch. This instance shows that Okonkwo's values do not match those of the community in all aspects, as the Week of Peace was one of great significance for the Umuofians.

Another important element to the Umuofian community was that of title and personal achievement, "His fame rested on solid personal achievement" (Ch. 1). Success was often measured by how many titles, barns, yams, and women a man had to his name. There were four titles a man could earn in society at that time; they were for purchase and therefore showed how much the man had accumulated in his lifetime. Throughout the novel, we see Okonkwo's status change in direct relationship to his actions. He is praised, stalled, exiled, and regains stature throughout the story.

Umuofian culture within Things Fall Apart held a very specific expectation of a woman's role within the community. Achebe depicts an accurate representation of Ibo society and explains the capacity of pre-colonial women in Africa. For example, the Ibo culture permitted the beating of women. This notion is shown repeatedly throughout the book, specifically the two times when Okonkwo beats his second wife, Ojiugo. The first instance involving a late meal as mentioned above and the second was a result of the young woman tending a banana tree, "Without further argument, Okonkwo gave her a sound beating and left her and her only daughter weeping." (Ch. 5). However, separate from the disgraceful behavior men were permitted to bestow upon

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their wives, women had a legitimate place in society. For instance, during the festival of the Feast of the New Yam, women “scrubbed the walls and the huts with red earth until they reflected light” (Ch. 5). Women were also responsible for the preparation of meals for their husbands and children and the harvesting of coco-yams, beans, and cassava.

Another communal value Achebe emphasizes is symbolism. Yams are a central theme in the book as a representation of three things, the first of which is masculinity. When asking Nwakibie to assist his yam keeping, Okonkwo said, 'I know what it is to ask a man to trust another with his yams, especially these days when young men are afraid of hard work. I am not afraid of work' (Ch. 30). The second theme is that of wealth, 'He [Okonkwo] was a wealthy farmer and had two barns full of yams' (Ch. 1). Deduced from the above is the final theme, provision. If yams are a large factor in the wealth and masculinity of a man, then they define his ability to provide for his wives and children, “Yam stood for manliness, and he who could feed his family on yams from one harvest to another was a great man indeed' (Ch. 4). The kola nut is another central symbol ingrained in the book; it is a drink provided at West African gatherings to symbolize prosperity and peace. The sharing of these symbols between the Ibos represents peace, unity, and kindness.

Chinua Achebe crafted an incredibly diverse and thoughtful culmination of his knowledge of the Igbo culture to emphasize the communal traits of strength and masculinity, title and personal achievement, women’s roles in society, and symbolism. These values held the nine tribes of Umofia together within the plot of Things Fall Apart.