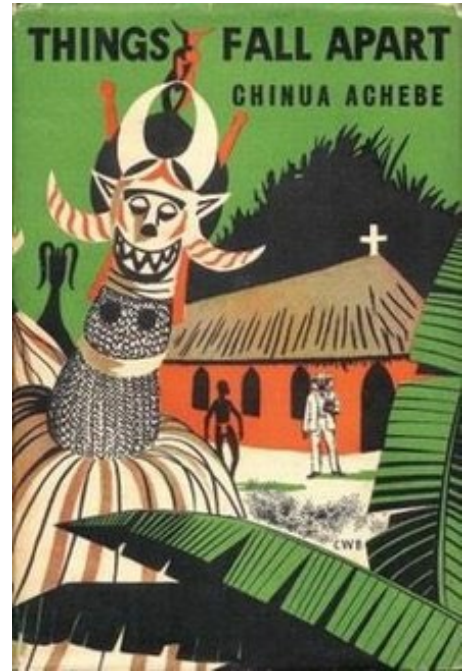


“Does some knowledge belong only to particular communities of knowers?”

Object 1: *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe

Things Fall Apart by Chinua Achebe is a novel that was published in 1958. It tells the story of the Igbo people (a Nigerian tribe) and their deeply rooted cultural and religious practices.

Achebe infuses his writing with cultural references and literary devices (such as “Okonkwo’s fame had grown like a bush-fire in the harmattan”) that show how the Igbo people understand their world. Their economy is based on agriculture, so they have specific words like “harmattan” which represents the dry and dusty season. This knowledge may seem strange and foreign to me, but this is crucial knowledge for the Igbo people to have because if they plant their yams during this season they will not survive. Achebe was born in an Igbo town and is part of this community of knowers, so he *understands* the Igbo people and shares their knowledge.



As a white girl from an affluent town, I read about other cultures and through studying them in school, I respect and appreciate them. However, I also must acknowledge that I will never be able to fully *understand* them, as I was not born into this culture and I don’t think that anyone outside of a culture or community can truly know things in the same way as someone inside it. People see the world through the paradigms that are created through their personal experiences, so culture is a lens that every person sees the world through.

Things Fall Apart serves to spread knowledge about Igbo culture, but the only people who truly *know* these cultural aspects and the people who this knowledge belongs to are the Igbo people. Without reading this book, I never would have heard of the Igbo people. After reading the book, I was in awe of the fact that there was an entire culture I had never heard of. This highlighted my ignorance even further, in my naive belief that I would ever be able to know of every culture. While I will never be able to truly *know* Igbo culture or be part of that community of knowers, I now appreciate it because Achebe chooses to share his story to enrich any individual’s pursuit of knowledge.

Object 2: “Rapper’s Delight” by The Sugar Hill Gang

“Rapper’s Delight” by The Sugar Hill Gang in 1979 was the first rap song to be played on the radio. It angered many of the originators of Hip Hop because it did not tell the true story of young, poor black men, and was heavily influenced by disco, the white style of music that Hip Hop artists were trying to dissociate from.

This song was labeled as “Hip Hop” but through radio this song left the neighborhood parties of the Bronx and entered the homes of affluent white teenagers in the Upper East Side. But it did not accurately portray the struggles of the originators of Hip Hop.

The communities of knowers we belong to does limit who is able to *know* certain things, as seen by the anger caused by “Rapper’s Delight”. The originators of Hip Hop were mad about the popularity of this song because of it being influenced by white culture through disco and played for a white audience. They felt that it was not accurately representing or disseminating the knowledge of black struggles during the 70s. White people could *appreciate* the lyrics, but not *know* them or be part of that community of knowers. In this case, culture is a limiting factor in that it prohibits white people from knowing black struggles, but it is an encouraging factor in that it attempts to share the genre of Hip Hop and appreciation of black culture.

Object 3: Pussyhat

In January of 2017, a sea of pink knitted hats flooded the streets of Washington, D.C. for the Women’s March. The founders of the Pussyhat Project™ wanted to create a way to unite all feminists and make a statement. They used the color pink and the word “pussy” that imply the supposed inherent weakness of women, and reclaimed them as a strengthening force. This hat represents an oppressed group of people taking ownership of discriminatory devices and using them to fight against their oppressors with civil disobedience.



The Pussyhat highlights that some knowledge does belong only to particular communities of knowers. Every person at the women's march was there for a different reason, but all fighting for the same movement. Only 21st century females know what it means to be a part of this group, know oppression through their own respective lenses, and know their culture in a way no one else can.

The hat also raises that even within communities of knowers there are different groups and communities within those groups. For example, while all of the women at the march share the knowledge of sexism, only some of the women share the knowledge of *both* sexism and racism. While every woman *knows* sexism, not every woman *knows* racism, and the acknowledgement of this serves to show that not everyone in a community is identical, and also that we all belong to multiple overlapping communities and sub-communities.