

"Dear Lawino"

Imagine that you are Lawino, Ocol's wife in the poem "Song of Lawino." Remember your rejection of the "modern" ways of the white Europeans. Remember your bitterness at the scorn your husband heaps on you because you have kept your traditional ways, and refuse to become like the Europeans.

You have been hired by a newspaper that is trying to help African people resist European influences. The newspaper considers these influences to be "cultural imperialism" – one nation trying to impose their culture on the people of another nation. They want you to write a kind of African "Dear Abby" column, to promote traditional values. As Lawino, respond to the letters below. **Write at least a paragraph response to each letter.**

Dear Lawino,

A sad thing is happening. My husband says that I am too old-fashioned. I am too "African," he says. He wants a promotion at the plantation, where he works for the British as a foreman. So he tries to act British. When he comes home he tells me that I am a disappointment. I won't straighten my hair, I wear my capulana and cook our traditional vegetable and maize dishes.

I think maybe he wants to leave me and find a more "modern" woman. What should I do, Lawino?

Signed,
African woman



Dear Lawino,

I have been at a missionary school for two years now. I am learning to speak English very well. All my friends and I practice English together when we talk. My friends are teaching their parents to speak English.

Here in Tanganyika, we need to speak English now. But my parents insist on speaking Swahili at home. They hit me when I speak English to them and order me to speak Swahili. Lawino, what can I do about my stubborn parents?

Signed,
English speaker

Dear Lawino,

My husband and I are facing a difficult choice: whether or not to send our boy to a missionary school run by Christians from Great Britain.

We only want what is best for our son but we worry that he will be tempted by the ways of the Europeans and taught that our traditional ways are bad. We also worry that these Christians will teach our son that Christianity is the only true religion and that Ngai, our God, is inferior or maybe not real at all.

This is the only school around and we know that reading and writing have become important. What should we do, Lawino?

Signed,
Concerned parents

Dear Lawino,

I have a lazy wife. I do all the work while she just stays at home and cooks and takes care of the children. I want her to go to work so we can buy things. As it is now, I make barely enough to survive. But if she'd work, we could buy canned food, a radio, nice clothes, a wristwatch, and other things that are in the new stores.

Before the Europeans came, we had no such nice things to buy. Now we have many - but it takes much money to buy them. How will I get my wife to go to work, Lawino?

Signed,
Tired of lazy wife



Dear Lawino,

My husband has changed a lot recently. Our village has always been a good place to live. People are nice to each other, help each other out with housework and in our gardens. When there is work to be done on someone's house, we all pitch in. It feels good to be working all together. We are one people, not just a collection of individuals.

But my husband says this is old fashioned. "Look out for yourself," he says. "You can't depend on others - and don't give handouts to people who can't help themselves."

These are ideas my husband gets while working for the Europeans in the cities.

Lawino, I want to respect my husband, but he is criticizing everything I believe in. What would you do if you were in my position?

Signed,
Village woman

