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Okonkwo's Distorted Conception of Masculinity in Chinua Achebe's
***Things Fall Apart* (1958)**

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Dedications

This thesis is dedicated to all my family members who contributed immensely to its realization.

To my parents whom this work could not be completed without their comforting presence and whose quiet strength carried me through every page. This work is entirely dedicated to you, in the hope that it could bring back a spark of the joy that life has lately taken from you. You are my eternal muse and my daily motivation.

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Abstract

This dissertation aims to investigate about Okonkwo's conception of masculinity in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958), asserting that his downfall derived from his relentless pursuit of manly characteristics. Following an anthropological reading of the Igbo society, the research depicts the communal values that balance power with wisdom and familial accountability. However, Okonkwo disregarded this stability by associating masculinity with aggression, supremacy, emotional suppression, and social standing, a notion forged by his traumatic experience of his father's disrepute. His severe treatment towards his family members, his incapacity to endure hardships that threaten his social position, and his refusal to assimilate the cultural change all pictured his contradiction to Igbo ideals of manhood. Thus, this study proved that Okonkwo's downfall did not stem from the collapse of traditional principles due to the colonial encounter, but rather from his own failure to align with the refined, communal interpretation of masculinity immersed within their culture.

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General Introduction

General Introduction

From its earliest manifestations, literature served as a crucial tool to narrate life events, conserve sacred traditions, and to interrogate the anchored values that tie communities together. Beyond its aesthetic dimensions, literature portrays vivid experiences that are universally relatable to readers, especially when the narratives reflect shared ethno-cultural struggles. Fictional stories revealed the complexity of human identity and emotional turmoil that sustain social life. This role is significantly apparent within postcolonial contexts as literature testified the resilience against cultural erasure and distortion.

During the mid-twentieth century, African literature emerged initially for the sake of reclaiming their authentic identity through a depiction of its rich heritage which was dangerously subjected to falsification due to the colonial discourse. Nigerian writers, in particular, achieved renown within this intellectual movement with Chinua Achebe triumphing with his poignant morals subtly woven into his literary texts. Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) represents the anthropological emblem of the Igbo culture at the threshold of colonial intrusion. Yet, beyond its postcolonial glance, the story explores the trajectory of a complex character Okonkwo who is caught between societal pressures and his internal fears and insecurities.

The novel follows the life of Okonkwo who is solely identified through the traditional conception of masculinity, power, and social standing. Achebe's narrative dives through a profound examination of gender roles and communal expectations which reveal the cultural and moral dynamics that govern the conducts of male individuals in a changing world. While scholars have mostly devoted their attention to cultural and colonial matters that hold a central focus in the narrative, few have emphasized on the inner conflicts of the traditional masculinity as characterized by Okonkwo. This study further examines Achebe's portrayal of a masculinity that was distorted from societal standards through its rigid conception which ultimately rendered to a destructive force. It further explores the core of Okonkwo's downfall tied to his toxic masculine ideals rather than to colonial incursion. Thus, this dissertation seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How does Achebe portray the cultural masculine ideals and to what extent did Okonkwo misinterpret them?
2. In what way did Okonkwo's conception of masculinity affect his personal relationships, emotions, and public conducts?
3. In what ways did Okonkwo's downfall reflect the consequences of the separation of Okonkwo's beliefs from communal values?

Therefore, this study aims to participate in the ongoing discussion about the matter of gender within the broad field of African literature, especially through a critical lens on masculinity. By shedding light on Okonkwo's character as a case study, the research underscores the implications of a manliness that was narrowly misaligned with the traditional structures of a society. Moreover, it grants a profound distinctive reading of Achebe's literary work and expands the research area into the gender-centered literary analysis in postcolonial texts.

This dissertation adopts a textual interpretation of *Things Fall Apart* (1958), making use of a gender theory that focuses on the notion of a rigid masculinity that extended the limits of traditional ideals. It emphasizes on narrative structure, character development, and cultural symbolism to reveal how masculinity was built and challenged through Okonkwo.

Additionally, the study is dissected through two chapters; the first one offers a contextual background of the Igbo society, African literature, and Nigerian literature in order to provide the necessary information for the readers to become acquainted with the social and literary environment. Whereas the second chapter first dedicates a part to the synopsis of the novel in question to, then, delve profoundly through the analysis of Okonkwo's masculinity moving from his rise to his collapse.

Chapter One:

Literature Review

1.1 Introduction

The notion of masculinity is usually shaped according to one's cultural environment and personal antecedents. It has been a predominant matter within the literary African field that was able to unfold its complexity through fictional narratives. African novels have been known to display a typical image of the African man, associated with strength, bravery, and patriotism. Chinua Achebe, in particular, trapped his male protagonist Okonkwo through his novel *Things Fall Apart* (1958) into a virile personage who was guided by his indigenous principles. His entire identity was further tied to conforming to the Nigerian society's standards of masculinity.

This chapter's role is to contextualize this society in its political and social spheres in order to facilitate a deeper understanding of Okonkwo's conduct, forged by the societal ideals. It will also analyze the defining characteristics of African literature before narrowing focus to the distinguishing features of Nigerian literature which are integrated within Chinua Achebe's work.

1.2 The Pre-Colonial Nigerian Society

Africa is characterized by a tapestry of nations carrying a significant heritage for centuries. Situated in the Western region of the continent, Nigeria is a nation endowed with socio-political vigor and cultural heterogeneity. One of its three largest ethnic groups is located in the southeastern part of the country, commonly referred to as 'Igbo'. This part of the research aims to explore specifically the Igbo Nigerian society before the arrival of the British missionaries in order to analyze their authentic and uninfluenced cultural identity.

1.2.1 Traditional Authority in Pre-Colonial Igbo Society

Pre Colonial Nigerian societies differed in regard to the political system they were following. Some communities operated through the centralized state system where one ancestral leader exerts authority. Power was supported by the principles of a

monarchical governmental structure which, monarchs, palace administrators, and advisory councils exercised (Iweriebor 508). In contrast, there were other Nigerian villages that lacked official, complex, and conspicuous state structures and designated officials (Iweriebor 507). Notably, the Igbo nation exemplified these labelled stateless, or acephalous societies.

As implied by the term ‘acephalous’, the Igbo were not governed by a single representative but rather by councils of elders (Iweriebor 508). In fact, the communities were not under official sovereignty. They were comprised of kindreds — nuclear families belonging to the same ancestry, and each one was ruled by the eldest male in the group (Onyeozili and Ebbe 33). Since their principles differed from the hereditary system, the authors clarified that in the event that this latter passes away the power will not be transferred to his son but to the succeeding oldest male. Furthermore, the social and political decisions were administered either by a widely representative ruling council or a large community assemble (Iweriebor 508). They were responsible for executing rites, maintaining tranquility, settling disputes, and securing the land (Ayodele). However, they operated within consultative mechanisms that did not allow them to enforce unilateral decisions on the community.

The presence of a council representative did not infer the performance of an absolute power and the submission of the Igbo people. As a matter of fact, these latter shared a consensual relationship while deciding about the prominent issues (Uzoigwe 144). If a disagreement occurs, they would all participate in conversations until a full accordance is attained, and even in some Igbo theocracies where the *Eze* (the Igbo term for ‘king’) governed, authority was constrained by communal debates and the king himself was attentive to their desires and opinions (Uzoigwe 146). Indeed, this order was tied to their cultural values as Horton enunciated:

The Egboes...would not, as a rule, allow anyone to act the superior over them, nor sway their conscience, by coercion, to the performance of any act, whether good or bad, when they have not the inclination to do so... (qtd. in Uzoigwe 146)

Ayodele explored a connection in his analysis between this system and Thomas Hobbes' principle¹ since they both obtained a legitimated agreement from the members of the community. Moreover, the political institutions, which were organized to manage the religious, socio-economic, political, as well as traditional matters of the people, were surveyed under the checks and balances system (Ayodele). The masses inspected any excess of power and in the eventuality of its occurrence, they possessed the right to divest the title from them in order to establish an egalitarian foundation and to thwart any tyrannical directorship (Ayodele). Hence, every prominent decision was negotiated between the high representatives and the people. Overall, the Igbo identifies as a decentralized state where the leadership was collective to symbolize the Igbo communal values. However, the representatives never inherited their status, but rather earned it through a collection of title attributions.

The concept of title taking is historically tied to the traditional Igbo culture as it identifies the citizen and recompenses his accomplishments and contribution to society. According to them, a knowledgeable and wealthy man is merely a potential leader who requires titles to activate his leadership (Onwuejeogwu 130). In fact, male figures dedicate their existence to gain this honored position through his individual achievement, and moral conduct within the public and private realms and therefore acquire public strength and respect, economic stability and internal pride. As Iwuagwu affirmed, "The Igbo...could be said to have had nobility not necessarily of heredity and ascription, but of achievement and merit, which was won through solid personal effort"(2-3), therefore one's exertion will never be disregarded in this community.

¹ Thomas Hobbes social contract theory, as mentioned in *Leviathan* (1651), referred to the communal accord of granting power to a sovereign authority

However, there is a wide collection of titles arranged for distinct social sectors. The majority were linked to the agricultural cultivation, principally the production of yam and cocoyam, distinguished as being their fundamental activity (3). Esteemed titles such as *Ezeji*² and *Di Ji*³ were awarded to these proficient cultivators to express the amount of respect given to this field (3). Beyond economic accomplishments, the Igbo culture equally appraised several personality traits for the purpose of promoting exemplary behaviors. The *Ọzọ* title, for instance, was associated with probity and integrity, as Agama expressed, “...the symbol of ọzọ title remains that a titleholder should live above board in terms of morality” (29), deeming it as being a mandatory characteristic for the bearer of title.

Consequently, individuals strived to idealize their behaviors in order to be rewarded, profiting both the member and the community. However, if they failed to meet the standard conducts designated by tradition, they would be deprived of their titles which would result to a public shame impacting both the man and his relatives (29). Thus, in spite of the advantageous factors, this elevated social standing immersed men in social pressure and responsibilities.

1.2.2 Social Structure in Igbo Society

This study aims to describe the African society in its various domains, particularly the Nigerian Igbo community. It is characterized by its cultural and social structures that shaped their conservative values, authoritative attitude and world perception before the colonial intrusion. Their ancestors have established rigid expectations towards the

² Igbo term for ‘chief yam farmer’ or ‘king of yams’

³ ‘yam owner’ or ‘yam master’ in Igbo

behaviors of the habitants to honor their historical background. This section seeks to examine each one of their features in order to comprehend their cultural context.

1.2.2.1 Gender Distribution of Roles in Traditional Igbo Family

The identity of the Igbo community cannot be analyzed without considering their traditional distribution of roles and responsibilities within the private and public spheres. In their system of genealogy, the conjugal family is the smallest and most fundamental unit of their social order and generally it is a “polygynous” one consisting of a man, his wives, their children, and his slaves, depending if they own ones (Uzoigwe 143). Nevertheless, their customs allowed the presence of harmony within their dwellings considering that each wife possessed her own house with her infants to minimize the internal conflicts and tension between the wives (Mere 156).

The adults segregated their tasks conforming to their rooted traditions which Mere vocalized as “a sex-linked division of labor” (157). On the one hand, the man was at the head of each of his households and the one who held command over everyone (Onyeozili and Ebbe 33). His role consisted of securing the members of his family not only physically but also economically since their entire livelihood depended upon his farm cultivation (Mere 157). Hence, he was utterly accountable for his family’s financial stability. Aside from that, the male figure oversaw multiple household functionalities regarding various domains such as mechanics, plumbing, and medicine (Isidienu 124). Thus, he is the leader of the house and is expected to execute masculine chores.

On the other hand, the woman held distinct tasks allotted by society. She was supposed to nourish her husband and children with her meals and provide maternal affection to her kids by raising them and educating them and even though these are her major roles she also worked in trade and farm production (Mere 157). Nevertheless, women were underprivileged in several rights compared to men as Mere substantiates in his statement, “regarding statuses within Igbo family there exists unmistakable male dominance” (158). Females were not allowed to possess a property, pursue their formal

education, inaugurate a business of their own, or participate in political elected positions to gain reputable titles (Obienusi 185). Such limitations resulted into their economic and social reliance on their husbands. However, the significance of family in Igbo society extended far beyond these domestic responsibilities, being a foundational mainstay for the preservation of their cultural values and social order.

1.2.2.2 Igbo Conception of Marriage

The union between the man and his wife, or wives, known as marriage, impacted the man's individual identity as well as the welfare of society. First of all, marriage was never optional for the two genders but rather a traditional and religious duty (Isidienu 123). The reason is that the social value and recognition of man depended wholly upon his marital status, a point the writer reinforces by stating, "without marriage, a person is looked upon as an incomplete human being" (122). This mere alliance enables the individual to gain respect and acknowledgment in the Igbo society. It allows him to participate in communal conversations where his opinion is now estimated and to unlock the door of the acquisition of titles (122). Nevertheless, being solely married is not the single condition for social elevation; their union must be eternally culturally validated for the reason that its triumph or failure determines the reputation of its members.

Marriage was culturally deemed triumphant contingent upon the existence of two major elements. According to the Igbo customs, the success and aim of marriage lies in both the procreation of children and the efficiency of their education (Isidienu 124). Their ingrained morals placed substantial emphasis on the production of children, considering it as the ultimate purpose of marriage.

Notably, they believe that the solidity and viability of marriage relies upon the generative capacity (Smith, 'Romance, Parenthood, and Gender in a Modern African Society' 129). Eventually, if failure of childbearing occurs within the initial years of marriage, the couple will be exposed to social scrutiny and gossip (140). Their reaction may be justified by the perception that such inability represents an underachievement of

traditional expected roles. Consequently, this will affect their social worth, especially that of women, as articulated by the scholar Kalu "...a woman must have children to be fully considered woman" (284).

While this may appear to be an exaggerated claim, the underlying reason for such emphasis is that it is not only an intimate matter, but rather a communal one. In fact, reproducing constructs and strengthens communal and kinship ties as well as endures lineages (Smith, 'Legacies of Biafra' 39). Nevertheless, cultural pressure proceeded beyond the expectation of childbirth, further exhibiting an evident preference for one gender over the other.

1.2.2.3 Male Child Syndrome

Igbo families publicly expressed their favoritism and preference towards the male individuals. This phenomenon, often referred to as 'male child syndrome', can be ascribed to several interconnected socio-cultural and economic factors that conformed to their traditional morals and social structures. From the very moment of birth, the contrasting celebrations were determined by gender norms, as the arrival of a boy evoked collective joviality whereas that of a girl was received by a mourning ambience (Mere 158).

The reason is that men owned various advantages that contributed to the amelioration and preservation of the community. An illustration would be that only male individuals are allowed to accomplish political and religious functions, while women are expected to marry and leave their father's house, thus they cannot be assigned roles that last a lifetime (Nwokocha 220). These duties held such a high significance and value to the society that they were granted to the representative head of the family. Besides, male offspring are considered as lineage conservators, since they sustain their family line, and inherit the secured assets (Iherue 32).

In fact, the male child was perceived as a dual source of security, benefitting both parents. On the one hand, the father gained in social authority since his neighbors were

reluctant to even initiate any confrontation with him and on the other hand, the woman assured a higher degree of stability and communal regard as it consolidated her position in the marital family (32-33). Hence, the male offspring is not only advantageous but as well necessary for an Igbo family, so much that individuals are willing to go to exceptional lengths to secure his birth.

Women were motivated to attempt childbearing for several times even under life-threatening conditions, a practice that resulted to high fertility and maternal mortality rates (34). However, in the case where none of the wives' man delivered a male heir, culture proposed adjustable measures. They invented the conversion of a daughter to a successor who would assume the typical masculine roles and own the same rights as a son labelled as the 'male-daughter', as well as the possibility of a woman to woman marriage for the purpose of having a descendent under the husband's family name known as the 'woman-husband' (Osuji 111).

This proves that the society is capable of sacrificing the deeply rooted traditions of the social structure in order to pursue the lineage. However, the gender disparity applied in these social practices and principals gifted men with a certain degree of power that was sometimes misused. Masculinity can be confused with hostility as men presumed their power would be exhibited by acting violent towards their wives which contradicts his supposed duties, as Iherue expressed it:

This superiority and preference immunity when not adequately checked can result to excess freedom which may end up in perpetrating crimes which makes the male a threat in the system he is meant to protect (29).

Therefore, it is essential to emphasize on the moral and intellectual guidance of the children as they represent the future stewards of communal well-being, entrusted with preserving customs while promoting social development.

1.2.2.4 Children's Education

The Igbo people were extremely strict when it came to the education of their children since it described and influenced their public image. The parents were assigned to install in their children since infancy the morals of etiquette, discipline, and diligence which meet their cultural values (Isidienu 124). They further instructed each gender in the domestic duties they have to execute to prepare them for their future accountabilities as husband and wife.

For instance, the girls were taught the basic household chores every potential mother has to master such as cooking and caregiving (Nduka 283). While men were trained on certain qualities deemed essential for any leader such as bravery, forthrightness, humbleness, and tolerance (Iherue 31). In this manner, if each family complies with this structure, it will lead to the preservation of lineage, masculinity, and social stability. In consequence, it forged a profound interconnection between the man and his society, urging him to develop instinctual collective dedication and brotherhood.

1.2.3 Spirit of Brotherhood in Igbo Communities

In Igbo traditional community, the principle of brotherhood was incorporated within men as a foundational base of their cultural fabric, not merely as a value but as an experiential reality. The society was deemed by its inhabitants as one 'extended family'; they regarded and interacted with one another as though bound by kinship (Asikaogu 46). Moreover, Onwuatuegwu summarized the role of community in this quote: "In Igbo

society, umunna⁴ is a source of guidance, protection, and collective responsibility” (140).

In fact, within this kind of societies parents were not the only individuals who educated their offspring since other members of the clan had the right and even necessity to; for instance if a child is misconducting in a public location he will be immediately lectured by members, who do not share any direct familial connection, and this will increase the child’s desire to remain flawless as well as develop a profound regard and readiness to defend his tribe (Isidienu 125-126).

Additionally, the Igbo possessed an ‘exogamous nature’ which is the act of marrying outside the limited family circle for the sole purpose of reinforcing the interconnectedness and social cohesion throughout the broader community (Onwuatiegwu 141). In consequence, the community was a symbol of respect and tuition which forged a special link between each member.

There existed multiple items that fostered their relationship and tied the community together and the two major illustrations are labor and music. Whenever communal tasks were to be accomplished, the responsibility was collectively embraced as they gathered with provisions and melodies and assisted one another, and this was nurtured from childhood with the intention that it stimulates the sense of solidarity in children (Asikaogu 46).

From an early age Igbo men were accustomed to the communal life through recurrent socialization and cultural education, thus the more deeply immersed in their

⁴ Igbo term which translates literally to ‘kindred’, is a number of kinship groups belonging to the same extended family who share an ancestry

social fabric, the more they develop an inner accountability and a sense of indebtedness to them (46). This can be explained by the fact that this environment promoted the instillation of high values such as the importance of their devotion to society which would elevate his social standing within both the domestic and external spheres. All in all, the notion of solidarity cannot be detached from the Igbo cultural identity as it contributed to the construction and progression of a man's character.

Overall, the Igbo civilization displays a community deeply anchored in tradition with its intricate political system, social structures, and gender roles. From the consensual framework of government to the intrinsic worth of family, brotherhood, and lineage, each aspect reflects their notion that individual actions cannot be detached from the communal welfare.

Their society is known to expect certain characteristics from each member in order to define them, be it in title acquisition, marriage, or child rearing. These societal principles should be historically engraved as a means to transmit and preserve this rich legacy. Eventually, literature exists to recount, reflect and even critique, due to its role as a vital lens for discovering the traditional and historical life experiences of Nigeria and the continent as a whole.

1.3 African Literature

African literature is an extensive and evolving field that encloses both oral and written works entrenched in the historical, cultural and social experiences of the continent and its inhabitants. Scholars have been debating upon the right classification of African texts; some relate it to the African origin of the writer, while others extend it to the content that significantly envelops their realities, regardless of the author's nationality. This study undertakes the notion that African literature is identified through its peculiar method of narrating, and its recurrent themes that envelop Africa's patrimony, which cannot be confined to a geographical setting. It will further provide a concise examination over its progression and common concerns. Therefore, it involves both the

prosperous oral traditions and the contemporary writing techniques in either indigenous or European languages.

1.3.1 Oral literature

The history of African literature initially commenced with the oral literary techniques to evolve into the contemporary written genres which are now globally accessible. It encompasses a broad range of forms such as “poems, hymns, songs, "myths", "legends", fiction, riddles, and proverbs” (Uzoigwe 20). These traditions were considered as the earliest forms of African literary expression. For this reason, several Western scholars presumed that oral traditions emerged intentionally as a function of society’s primitive era, implying that it occurred as an adaptive mechanism during the absence of literacy.

However, the scholar Ruth Finnegan rejected this assumption and affirmed that these labelled “primitive” societies were in fact introduced to literacy centuries ago, hence the position of oral literature stands as a sophisticated literary technique sacred to the history and communal rituals in its own right rather than an indicator of deficiency (54).

He further insisted that oral art cannot be limited to uttered words only but is additionally featured by composition and performance; in fact, the traditional literature is shaped by the wittiness of the performer, the interaction with the audience, as well as the cultural setting that inspires its significance (60). Therefore, it can be considered as an animated experience which transcends the written passive practice.

Despite its thriving through interactive performance, yet its preservation from generation to generation is attributed to the collective memory of the individuals which allows it to be recounted, reinterpreted, and written in contemporary novels (Ighile1673). Additionally, African oral literature was perceived through cultural, artistic, social and historic paradigms which demonstrate its position in both preserving the past and embracing this rich cultural heritage (Ekpe 269). Thus, African novelists included them in their writings as an idiosyncratic aspect of their cultural identity which

avored a worldwide literary value. This type of literature held international impact and recognition, yet its greatest benefits were initially felt within the lives of individuals in the African social sphere.

Oral traditions were specifically narrated during communal gatherings which fulfilled a multiplicity of functions to the listeners. They were recounted specifically during nighttime following an arduous day of labor, leading them to earn the appellation “Tales of Moonlight”, and they comprised a wide array of stories reflecting the community’s cultural practices, natural environment, and sacred deities (Devi, Mishra 297). Their purpose lied in reinforcing virtuous and wise characteristics, promoting social justice as well as archiving the cultural legacy of the African identity (Ohia 8).

In spite of sharing the same aim, the moral lessons were still customized according to each gender. Males were accustomed to hearing stories that promoted boldness and strength whereas females were socialized into emotional stories (Devi, Mishra 299). This latter highlights that oral literature serves as a tool for reinforcing gender norms and incorporating the expected attitudes from each one of them.

In addition to tales, proverbs performed a crucial role in oral literature. While advising, warning, and providing moral lessons, they were structured in an aesthetically beautiful manner with wise lyrics that penetrate the mind to an extent that ordinary words could never attain (Ohia 12). Moreover, they left a tremendous impression on the audience and encouraged the proper conducts according to their etiquette. All in all, African cultures along with their beliefs, customs, and lifestyles were authentically portrayed in these tales and therefore in novels which contain thematic concerns that mirrored the daily realities of African communities.

1.3.2 Current Themes in African Novels

African novels were significantly influenced by the cultural and historical context of the continent. They attempted to display an accurate image of a standard traditional life for an African individual by delving into their struggles provoked by colonial encounters,

their cultural practices, and their social structures. These literary texts remained consistent to a number of themes that were fundamental in each African setting. In the words of Ebeogtj, “African literature must be seen as one literature; a literature shaped by similar historical and cultural circumstances, and characterized by similar traits” (25).

Moreover, by virtue of sharing historical and cultural experiences, African literary texts converged around related issues. Hence, within this framework emerged African realism during the 20th century as a literary trend that aimed to describe the actuality of the continent’s life which often referred to the consequences of the colonial rule (Tandon 854). From this perspective, African fiction unfolds its major themes regarding the collective complexities and critical disruption of African communities.

1.3.2.1 Resistance to Eurocentric Narratives

Colonialism contributed immensely into the appearance and notoriety of the African fiction. The African novels came into existence primarily as a reaction to the colonial discourse held by European colonizers which involved a misreport of African identity. In fact, within this “Eurocentric” account, they illustrated Africans as ferocious human beings who inhabit “a dark continent” which urged the African writers to contradict and to decentralize and undermine through their texts the European dominating sovereignty (Altijani 25).

The contrastive description of the African individual, depicted as barbarous and backward as opposed to the Western culture, considered as the model of universality, permitted the colonizers to legitimize their conquering, annexation, and demolition of subjugated communities (Olatunji 129). Hence, Westerners appeared as benevolent civilizers who educated African societies through colonization which motivated African literary voices to defend their identity and restore their own narrative.

This counter-discourse aspired to express the reality from their perspectives and to confront the dominant version that shaped the interpretation of society and therefore erode their hegemonic assumptions and initiate a decolonizing process that would

expend a dialogue between the supremacy of the colonized and the rebellion of the marginalized (Amirouche 525). Thus, the pen formerly served African writers who desired to reclaim their image and restore dignity to their culture and history. Yet, beyond the cultural representation, postcolonial African literature highlights as well the struggles of the indigenous communities during the colonization.

1.3.2.2 Colonial Impact on the African Individual

Postcolonial literature described through its novels the considerable changes the colonized societies had to endure. Displacement was one of the most pressing repercussions. This latter was enacted in both material and symbolic forms. On the one hand, they were expropriated of their territory and were expelled vigorously by European invaders either under laws of apartheid laws⁵, detention, or political isolation which all eradicated Africans from their homeland. On the other hand, a more psychological displacement occurred where black African writers would feel marginalized in the literature of their own nation as it had been overruled by colonial white authored texts (Altijani 167).

Ultimately, the colonial encounter further altered their life trajectory as well as their sense of belonging in their own environment. In fact, individuals felt entrapped between reminiscing about their tribe, culture, and native landscape and being incapable to detach from the invaders' culture due to their compulsive adaptation to this new lifestyle (Iftakhar, Nusrat 53). This situation eventually engendered a profound identity crisis among African citizens.

⁵ The legalized system of racial segregation and discrimination in South Africa that was legally imposed from 1948 until the early 1990s

Writers could not overlook the aftermath of colonization, especially the identity dilemmas it generated to nations. After the traditional social structures swiftly collapsed under colonial sovereignty due to instant urbanization, a deep identity confusion rose among individuals which intensified the literary concerns about their historical origins and identity that were discussed in the works of the 1950s (Panda 36).

Accordingly, the quest for their cultural identity was a preponderant concern in African fiction since writers fought to denounce their genuine personality and to construct a modern culture founded on indigenous values rather than imported ones (Anjaneyulu 395). For instance, authors have relied on the oral literature that has long molded African storytelling to assert their authentic identity and introduce it to foreigners after years of colonial distortion (Ojaide 51). Apart from the unpleasant outcomes of colonial rule, African literature also illuminates the surviving social structures of African communities.

1.3.2.3 Aspects of African Society in African Literature

Literature reflected multiple features central to African communal life through its modern novels. One defining characteristic was their mystical and spiritual dimension which shaped both their conduct and their social perception. Indeed, their spiritual beliefs held an integral component of African literature, especially in drama and fiction, where terrestrial affairs were not explained in a rational manner but rather through spirits, ancestors and gods.

For instance, the infringement of the natural rules invited a retributive illness or misfortune from the metaphysical realm and it is the role of diviners and healers to secure their communities from the evil forces of wizards and witches through recommended rituals and sacrifices (Ojaide 47). Furthermore, writers portrayed the African society's interpretation of reality through their spirituality along with the existence of supernatural dimensions capable of impacting the individuals' physical and social well-being.

Across African communities, one can also notice the systems of justice grounded within communal customs and values. Their approach relied on “restorative justice” which believes that criminal actions violate the presence of respect and balance of the community and that its prior goal was to restore collective harmony within society through a reconciliation of the shattered relationship (Bwire 2). Local authors displayed the distinct African notion of judicial approach contrasted to the colonial method, considering that westerners depended on punitive imprisonment which has led to social divisions whereas Africans counted on the restitution and the responsibility of the well-respected impartial community leaders to achieve appeasement and reintegration of offenders (Chukwudebelu 15). Thus, literary novels shed light on this unique vision of justice entrenched in African traditions reflecting social harmony in addition to communal participation.

Another feature of traditional African life described in literary novels is the interconnectedness individuals have developed with one another. The kinship network functioned as an educative institution who transmitted core values and basic knowledge through observation, imitation, and daily communication in order to shape the future generation into morally accountable and socially integrated members of society (284). Moreover, child education in African settings was inseparable from the communal intervention which characterized the identity of society as a whole.

The Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong’o showed through his novels that the African communal spirit was a result of the individuals’ shared experiences and a means of shielding their culture; in fact, traditional values and behavioral conceptions were transferred through generations which created a unified history and culture (Alam 1-2). All in all, collectivity was a recurrent matter that founded both individual identity and social harmony which was accurately demonstrated in African literature.

Alongside the communal participation in the educational practices, African literary authors have also portrayed the significant functions that each gender was allocated by society. During the early stages of African literature, male writers

marginalized the female characters within stories by restraining them solely to their prescribed roles as mother and wife while few were impersonated as credible and strong protagonists (Fonchingong 135).

With regard to men, they were shaped around the image of the “big-man”, distinguished as combatants, moneymakers, and family providers which mirrored the socio-cultural expectations where men carry traits of authority, vigor, endurance, and even violence and any disturbance of these traditional roles were considered threatening to the social order and marital harmony (Teiko 331). Through these portrayals, African literature underlined the significance and the impact that role assignments had in sustaining social organization. These thematic preoccupations have been expressed in African novels through either indigenous or local languages for justifiable reasons.

1.3.3 The Language Question in African Literature

Within the African literature area, the decision to communicate in a particular language was not achieved arbitrarily, rather with a clear intention to transmit a message to their desired audience. On one side, writers such as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, Obi Wali, and Niyi Osundare asserted that the African cultural authenticity and sustainability lied in linguistic indigenization, and Ngũgĩ went so far as to describe the rejection of local languages as a “tantamount of blasphemy”. On the other side, authors like Chinua Achebe, Gabriel Okara, and Ayi Kwei Armah opinionated that foreign languages are capable of being adapted to reflect the African accounts, as Achebe expressed:

I feel that English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experiences. But it will be new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new African surroundings (qtd in Olatunji 129).

Eventually, African theorists like Frantz Fanon justified their rejection of utilizing foreign languages by considering them as a mechanism of assimilation under colonial rule, which has consequently enabled invaders to extend their domination and achieve spiritual subjugation. In addition, the use of colonial languages would imply a

subordination among the “imitator” as well as an approval of foreign cultural and ideological perception of the community in which the language occurs (Asante-Darko 5). Writers who opposed the adoption of colonial languages feared a gradual detachment of African roots from locals.

Despite such critics, other African scholars remained steadfast regarding their preferable option of writing in foreign languages. Indeed, they argued that an African literary work is capable of being accurately narrated while using an exotic medium since it can still express their distinctive worldview, values, and social structures (Ebeogbu 29). Furthermore, these writers demonstrated their ability to keep the cultural essence intact despite the language selected.

In fact, certain figures of speech or expressions such as the line in Awoonor’s *Songs of Sorrow* “when I clean it cannot go” may seem senseless for English users while they bore a symbolic significance for the local readers who are familiar with the cultural contexts (Ojaide 54). Ultimately, African writers have opted for a compromise that sought to fulfill the demands of both sides of the debate by infusing these external languages with local elements in order to shield the African culture. Thus, this argumentation was not revolving around a mere selection of language, rather an inner wrestle for cultural authenticity and sustainability after a sustained period of ideological imposition.

In conclusion, African literature emerged as an expressive platform for the continent’s ethnic struggles and cultural habits. Writers used their voices to denounce the impacts of colonial imposition and to defend the worth of African identity through oral traditions and communal narratives. Additionally, they explored their social structures through themes of justice, identity, and gender norms which merged both men and women in societal expectations. Having examined the broader characteristics of African literature, this study now shifts to the Nigerian literature which represents its central focus.

1.4 Nigerian Literature

Nigerian literature carried a central position in African writing. The Nigerian novels enveloped the country's historical background, and ancestral traditions. It reflected national issues related to identity, authority, and society. Furthermore, Nigerian themes resonate with both local readers who are familiar with the cultural context and international audiences who identify with universal life experiences.

1.4.1 Nigerian Literature as a Cultural and Social Expression

The Nigerian literature initially appeared as a reaction to a traumatic historical event. As a matter of fact, Nigeria was colonized by the British missionaries from the mid-nineteenth century until they obtained independence in 1960. Consequently, national writers, often labelled as first generation Nigerian writers, rose to chronicle their damaging experience of colonial rule. They carried themes such as the paradox between urban and rural life, and the rivalry between the European and the indigenous cultures while picturing their pre-colonial Nigerian communities idealistically as they were influenced by the Negritude movement⁶ (Fasan 39). Besides of reconstructing the pre-colonial Nigerian societies through their novels, these authors conserved their cultural legacy within ancient oral forms.

1.4.2 Nigerian Oral Literature

Oral literature contributed to the propagation of Nigeria's literary and cultural history. Its purpose lied in eternalizing the traditional aspects of the community and educating

⁶ An ideological and anti-colonial movement led by francophone African and Caribbean writers that sought to praise Black African identity in a time of colonial oppression.

the youth on the right behavioral conduct in society. They instructed morals that revolved around the respect towards ancestral authority, the connection between the individual and his community, and the notion of masculinity according to the social vision. Furthermore, multiple stories were dedicated to heroic male protagonists whose actions defined the social masculine standard.

Traditional stories illustrated several characteristics that must be found in Nigerian male individuals. One of their various accounts was the one with Dimgba who resonated with the cultural assumption of masculinity. Dimgba was a brave wrestler who attributed his victories to his inner satisfaction as well as to his community. He was an undefeatable adversary who demonstrated endurance and determination in his battles until he became a well deserving champion and a model figure in the community, as the author explained “...matches allow both wrestlers and the winning communities to gain respect by validating their masculinity through strength, skills, and victories (Ayodabo 40). This story has travelled through generations to praise the cultural practice of wrestling and reinforce ideal masculine traits. Moreover, such legends associated men with honor, communal pride, and valiance which emphasized the significance of masculinity in Nigerian literary expression that further extended to the written sphere.

1.4.3 Male Narratives and Gender in Nigerian Literature

Nigerian writers of the first generation were predominantly men who followed similar characterizations in their novels. The majority of their literary texts were constructed upon the life of male protagonists. In fact, they formed gender roles through a “bio-essentialist” perception where men were exalted as heroes and leading figures while women were condescended as passive and domestically confined personages (Oloruntoba-Oju 8).

An ideal illustration is found in the prosperous Nigerian writer Wole Soyinka who carried stereotypical distribution of gender roles through his characters. In his notorious play entitled *The Lion and the Jewel*, he portrayed men as operative leaders

whereas women were considered as emotional individuals who exist solely to benefit the male agency (Onuoha 30). Thus, Soyinka's portrayal highlights the cultural conception of gender entrenched in Nigerian society and furthermore in Nigerian writing during this era.

Nigerian literature has produced numerous significant works that popularized the national art, yet none owned the cultural expression and global recognition of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958). This novel enabled the African literature's entry into the worldwide podium with its vivid reflection of the Igbo society and cultural exploration of gender dynamics.

1.5 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the necessary cultural and literary contextual background to understand masculinity in Nigerian literature. It has delved into the Nigerian Igbo society which constitutes of a profound cultural heritage. Its traditional instructions through communal intervention and storytelling have contributed to the adherence of citizens with rich anchored values including their collective dedication, pursuit of personal achievement, and desire to comply with exemplary conducts concocted by society. Furthermore, men were immersed in societal expectations to uphold masculine traits. This aspect is immaculately illustrated in the famous novel *Things Fall Apart* by the Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe which will form the centerpiece of this study's subsequent analysis.

Chapter Two:

Okonkwo's Conflict with Igbo Ideals of Masculinity

2.1. Introduction

Human beings live with a delusional conception that they are immunized from life's scheming trials, until some challenging predicaments perturb this belief and confront them with the frailty of their own identity. Fictional narratives mirror this reality; though their characters are imaginative, their struggles could still reverberate with readers as they encapsulate universal human dilemmas. *Things fall apart* (1958) by Chinua Achebe is a classic illustration of a tale that went beyond fiction to enlighten question of self-identity, failure, and psychological resilience. While it was initially written for the sake of exposing the colonial encounter, its core dealt with the correlation between a man and his society.

2.2. Things Fall Apart Synopsis

Things Fall Apart (1958) is considered as one of the most emblematic literary products of modern African literature. The fictional story follows the hectic life of the protagonist Okonkwo in a peculiar folkloric setting. The narrative represents the totem of the Igbo culture entailing its customary practices, superstitious beliefs and archetypical inhabitants. Yet, their traditional community will later be disrupted by the colonial encounter they suffered from. Through the story, the readers will explore the society's sacred identity that followed its varied response to colonial intrusion as well as the main character's pursuit of success and attitude towards the life assessments that shaped his journey.

The curtain rises in the pre-colonial Igbo clan of Umuofia, being one of the nine villages of the Nigerian lower tribe. Okonkwo is renowned by his community as a reputable warrior, a tenacious labourer and an exemplary provider for his family. Within the early pages of the novel, Okonkwo's despise of his father Unoka is unapologetically expressed. The latter epitomized his son's utmost fear with his lethargic attitude and fruitless career.

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Every episode narrated was soaked in a cultural environment that defined the Igbo identity. The characters are always seen engaging in ritualistic practices, annual festivals, and superstitious incidents. Even though it displays an appeased life, Okonkwo had fallen under a high amount of pressure for the sake of attaining the highest rank in society economically as well as honourably which governed his subsequent actions.

Each year, a sacred practice occurs that antedates the week of yam planting which intends to sanctify their harvest and likewise to secure harmony between villagers. As the term implies, “the week of peace” forbids any potential action that could disturb the communal peace. However, Okonkwo is unable to restrain his temper after his youngest wife failed to prepare his meal promptly. He then beats her heavily in the presence of all the villagers. The latter are shocked at his lack of consideration and respect to this revered custom. Thus, he is compelled to perform ritual sacrifices in order to restore the communal and spiritual balance.

The story is marked by a pivotal shift with the arrival of the character Ikemefuna. It is initiated by the assassination of a woman from Umuofia by external members of the neighbouring village Mbaino. To avoid any violent conflict, they negotiate upon a sacrifice of a young boy from their tribe, who would remain within Okonkwo's compound for three years until the elders determine his destiny, he is called Ikemefuna. During his deportation, he is tenderly welcomed and integrated by his novel family. He forges a strong alliance with Okonkwo's children, especially Nwoye, and surprisingly with Okonkwo as well since the young boy succumbed to call him ‘father’.

Moreover, to Okonkwo's gratification, the presence of the young adoptive boy favourably influences his son Nwoye's comportment. He delicately ignites interest in him towards masculine chores and tales, and has even awakened a sense of responsibility in him. Thus, Nwoye spontaneously imitates his worldview and mannerism disguised as a form of admiration to his figurative older brother.

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Unfortunately, the life of Ikemefuna comes to a sorrowful denouement when the oracle of the village condemns him to death as a retribution for Umuofia who lost one of its members. The family of Okonkwo is utterly devastated after hearing the news, yet Okonkwo takes it upon himself to witness this tragedy despite being warned not to. While Ikemefuna is being bashed with a machete, he ultimately runs towards Okonkwo's direction seeking protection when he receives the final stroke that ends his life from his own figurative father. This disaster affects profoundly the relationship between Okonkwo and Nwoye for the rest of the novel.

The fiction then unfolds in an unexpected direction after an inadvertent casualty occurred under the eyes of the entire village. In the midst of the ceremonial drumming melodies during the funeral of a respected elder clansman, Okonkwo fires his gun as a ritual gesture that symbolizes respect to the deceased. Lamentably so, his weapon accidentally targets the dead man's son. The villagers are flabbergasted to witness Okonkwo, a custodian of communal honour, committing a shameful murder, one they considered a "female" crime. Thus, he and his family are penalized by an exile for seven years into a neighbouring village called Mbanta.

The men of Umuofia instantly set fire to Okonkwo's compound and kill his animals in order to cleanse the village from his sin. Okonkwo is now neither physically nor symbolically present in his native land as though he is erased from the soil to which he had devoted his life. He is compelled to start anew in his mother's village away from his achievements and earned respect. The readers discern his determination and vigour that once identified him vague progressively.

The narrative develops in parallel juxtaposing the development of the two worlds. On one side, it follows the adventures of Okonkwo who is attempting to adjust himself to this new life. On the other side, his friend frequently visits him and transports him through his accounts to his native village. As nostalgic as it may sound, the village had undergone some harsh transformations in a remarkably short span of time although it had remained intact for centuries.

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Umuofia has been gradually invaded by Christian missionaries under the sight of the inhabitants. They victoriously built their churches and incited natives to embrace their own religion. Okonkwo is astonished by the inhabitants' indifferent reaction to the encroachment upon their land and even the conversion of some to their teachings. Among them is his son Nwoye who was amazed by the Christian beliefs. Thus, he was eagerly waiting for his return to settle this chaos and become the hero of the story.

After his return, Okonkwo participates in an Igbo cultural ceremony where they embellish masks and concretize gods named "egwugwu". It is only when Enoch, a Christian convert, offends the tribe by disclosing one of their egwugwu, that Okonkwo and the leaders of Umuofia furiously burn their sacred church. They are further detained and subjected to ill-treatment and physical violence by the district commissioner.

Once released, Okonkwo attempts to convince the villagers to revolt against the missionaries through a discourse which is swiftly interrupted by the colonial messengers. Frustrated, he makes a final act of defiance and kills deliberately one of the messengers hoping to ignite a spark within his tribe's soul. The villagers yet again deceive him by choosing silence instead of resistance for the sake of retrieving their cultural landscape.

Okonkwo figures the uselessness of his efforts as he accepts defeat and favours to take his own life rather than to witness the disenchanting spectacle of his clan's compliance to colonial authority. The novel ends on a sad note since Okonkwo's body could not even be touched by his tribal community due to his abominating act against the Earth goddess. Ironically so, the foreign invaders are the only ones allowed by their custom to handle the burial. At the end, the clansmen ought to cleanse the land to deprive it of Okonkwo's evilness.

The novel left the readers stunned by the twisting finale that revealed an unforeseen reaction on behalf of the protagonist who was confronted to uncontrollable upheavals. The story envelops the exploration of the strong ties constructed between

family and community within the Umuofian village. It further recounted the simultaneous collapse of both the protagonist and his native land. With the humiliating way his life ended, one cannot help but review his character to untangle his inner struggles and investigate about the triggering factors that have caused his destiny. Thus, this study aims to denounce the dangers of the misconceived masculinity through Okonkwo's development.

2.3. Okonkwo's Distorted Conception of Masculinity

Okonkwo's name echoed all across the Umuofian village as he epitomized the traditional conception of a true man at an early age. His achievements indeed proliferated in society and enabled him to earn respect from his entire tribe and to elevate his social standing. Thus, he was remarkably admired by his inner ambition and determination to uphold the ideals of manhood and avoid any behaviour potential to be associated with weakness. He further considered it a requisite duty to impart such characteristics to the succeeding generation. Yet, his obsession with masculine validation is not only urged by communal expectations, but also by personal traumatic apprehensions. Hence, he governed his life with a rigid conception of masculinity, one that shaped his relationship with his wives, children, and with himself.

2.3.1. Okonkwo and his Earned Social Position

Okonkwo embarked on his journey with no prior economic or social support. He only had an ambition and a determined objective in mind which indeed proved to be sufficient for his rise. In fact, Okonkwo soon figured that he could not rely on his father's inheritance, given that he died in poverty, thereupon he took it upon himself to chart his own path independently by relying solely on his personal efforts.

The major character's initial thrive of agriculture captured the Umuofian's attention and founded his social recognition. He was remarked by his arduous cultivation of yams which was culturally glorified as being the most esteemed of all crops in the Igbo society. He consequently collected numerous barns of yams through a diligent

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maintenance of his farms which symbolized a high level of material prosperity and masculine virtues in the eyes of the community. His early triumph in agriculture offered the first testimony to his resilience and vigour which detached him from the demeaning shadow of Unoka's indolence.

Beyond agricultural mastery, Okonkwo exhibited his expertise in wrestling fights and his participation in communal matters. His reputation reached the pinnacle after he battled fiercely with his most fearsome opponents. His crushing victory over Amalinze the cat was indeed a defining moment of his existence since the latter was a celebrated fighter who has not been beaten for seven consecutive years. His entrance in the battlefields was marked by steadfast bravery and unshakeable fortitude that concealed even the slightest trace of dread. In a society where wrestling was so highly esteemed, Okonkwo's victory offered him not only popularity but also the heart and affection of the woman that would become his wife. Ekwefi fell in love at first sight after admiring his passionate performance on the ring. This showed the community's prominent consideration of manly conducts.

As discussed in the preceding chapter, affluence served as a prerequisite that enabled men to acquire prestigious titles. This is perfectly exemplified in the character's accumulation of titles after having secured an economic stability. His rise satisfied his personal intentions, for it stood in direct opposition to his father's failure to obtain a single title during his lifetime. Titles functioned as vital markers of prestige and authority in Umuofia, emphasized in the encounter with the missionaries who questioned about the community's king to which the villagers responded with "We have men of high title..." (Achebe 148), which equated the stature of titleholders to kingship. His attribution of titles further recompensed Okonkwo's fulfilments and recognized his social standing and his deserving respect from all individuals.

Furthermore, his notable accomplishments granted him the privilege of participating in the village council's conversations. The leaders and elders of the village included him in primary communal decisions which highlighted the accountability

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ascribed to him. Thus, only after he attained social recognition did his opinions become attentively heard and acknowledged within the collective discourse. After having grasped this ideology, Okonkwo applied it in an altercation during a village assembly with a villager who contradicted his viewpoint. He deemed it necessary to publicly humiliate and silence him by retorting that “this meeting is for men”, implying that his voice was dismissed for the mere reason that he was a man without titles (Achebe 26).

Alongside his public accomplishments, his household symbolized another fundamental dimension of masculine achievements. His polygamous house compromising of three wives and numerous children testified the degree of responsibility he held on being the sole provider for his large family. “...he who could feed his family on yams from one harvest to another was a very great man indeed” (Achebe 35). These were Okonkwo's words that projected the communal consideration for the family provider, a standard he incessantly strove to attain. Moreover, his production of children and particularly sons secured the succession and longevity of his legacy. In fact, he endeavoured to instil certain values to his offspring that are deemed imperative for a man according to Okonkwo and his deeply rooted culture. In this respect, he desired that his future successors would honour him since masculinity could never be separated from public approval, for he insisted, “I will not have a son who cannot hold up his head in the gathering of the clan...” (Achebe 33). This stemmed from the protagonist's trepidation of reincarnating his father's misfortune which led to his obsessive desire to accomplish every trait of manliness.

In consequence, Okonkwo's success, which was presented in his material wealth as well as his affluent household, offered him the ideal reputation that he sought from the outset among the most esteemed men of Umuofia. He believed he had succeeded in overturning the failed legacy left by his father as his behaviours mirrored the traditional values upheld by his community so far. Yet, over the course of his life, he came to incorporate certain attitudes he assumed were aligned with masculinity where in reality they distorted its significance. Furthermore, he developed a rigid misconception of manhood that shaped his identity and extended deeply into his domestic sphere,

foreshadowing the eventual conflicts that would emerge in his household and personal life.

2.3.2. Patriarchal Figure of the Household

Okonkwo maintained a household that was fraught with recurrent turbulence. The wives enjoyed social standing and material security under Okonkwo's roof and each one of them were benefitted to have her own hut which ensured a stabilized and tranquil life. Nonetheless, this appeared insufficient for them for the reason that they required emotional and psychological security from the patriarch of the household. Indeed, Okonkwo expressed his rigidity through an exaggerated need of control and authority over his own wives which triggered permanent feelings of fear and apprehension of his volatile temperament.

2.3.2.1. Violence towards his Wives

One of the most troubling expression of Okonkwo's masculinity was manifested through his mistreatment towards his wives. His interpretation of communal values have led into a dependence upon physical violence to enforce his domination. Being raised in a society where wrestling was praised as the ultimate demonstration of masculine strength and the tool to attract public respect and admiration, Okonkwo concluded that brutality must be performed for the sake of testifying his masculinity and gaining estimation within his private arena. Therefore, he founded his relationships upon this basis which involved turbulent consequences.

As a matter of fact, he overlooked the primordial purpose of the husband being the protective figure of the household from any external threats when in reality he transformed into the actual menace they dreaded. Achebe from the start depicted the constant anxiety and disquiet the household was surviving in Okonkwo's presence even before narrating any violent action. His family lived in a daily anticipation of the instant his rage would inevitably erupt, as Achebe asserts, "Okonkwo ruled his household with

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a heavy hand. His wives, especially the youngest, lived in perpetual fear of his fiery temper, and so did his little children” (13).

Okonkwo instilled dread in his family even through the sounds of his approaching footsteps as the author adds, “When he walked, his heels hardly touched the ground and he seemed to walk on springs, as if he was going to pounce on somebody” (13). Achebe utilized zoomorphic imagery by comparing his movements to a predator who is ready to attack his prey. This selective diction highlights the inhuman intensity of his aggressive conducts. Further in the novel, he is observed to engage in frequent violent scenes under futile justifications. These following episodes illuminated the wives’ endurance in facing the consequences of Okonkwo’s evident inner rage.

The earliest instance of Okonkwo’s domestic physical violence coincided with the sacred week of peace which forbids conflicts that may disrupt their communal harmony. The incident happened as a result of the negligence of his youngest wife Ojiugo who failed, once in their marital union, to prepare his meal in due time. Her justification was that she had gone to her friend to braid her hair which intensified the outrageousness of her husband as she prioritized her needs over her duty.

Thus, as soon as she returned, he beat her incessantly before the eyes of his community, which exhibited an immense disrespect towards them. Despite being alarmed by his other wives who witnessed his unconsciousness and reminded him of the spiritual week, he remained intractable and completely distracted by his fury. Ironically, in desiring to display a gesture of strength and dominance, he inversely testified his feeble capacity to manage his emotions and redirect himself to the communal principles of reverence and obedience to law.

Therefore, Okonkwo owned an obstinate nature that permitted his misplaced authority to dominate over the spiritual boundaries, a reality captured in Achebe’s reflection “Okonkwo was not the man to stop beating somebody half-way through, not

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even for fear of a goddess" (30). At the end, he humiliated himself in front of the reputed men of society and demonstrated his uncontrollable temper.

His extremist reaction is tied to his inner fears of cultural validation. In fact, Okonkwo was raised with traditional ideologies that aimed to dictate their social behaviours and responsibilities. His society imposed strict and inflexible instructions about the gendered distribution of roles to spouses; while the wife was confined to domestic accountabilities and child rearing, the husband was expected to engage in agricultural labour, defend the community's honour, and attain titles which all contributed to the preservation and progress of the village.

Moreover, the author expressed the ideology that masculine authority was associated with domestic control in Umuofia in his words: "No matter how prosperous a man was, if he was unable to rule his women...he was not a real man" (53). The latter reflected Okonkwo's deepest fear of being deprived of his masculine identity and incurred any social ridicule that reminds him of his father's.

Consequently, Okonkwo, represented as a product of his society, was obsessed with the strict conformity to ascribed gender roles which led him to distinguish his wife's failure to prepare a meal as a disgrace to traditional expectations of domestic accountability. Yet, in attempting to implement and secure this duty through violence, he himself committed a far more aggravated offence by violating a sacred period. Thus, in this case communal harmony was more prioritized than individual authority which Okonkwo overlooked in a moment of impulse.

Another significant scene that illustrates Okonkwo's physical aggression occurred during The New Yam Festival. The latter was one of the most eagerly anticipated communal celebrations in the village of Umuofia. Its intention lied in expressing festivity and gratitude to their earth goddess for the harvest. Such a euphoric atmosphere was meant to be reflected within Okonkwo's household, but instead it degenerated into a setting of abrupt atrocity. Okonkwo inquired who has killed the

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banana tree which was initially inaccurate since his wife had merely cut few leaves for a domestic purpose. He left no room for further argument since Okonkwo immediately unleashed his anger on his second wife Ekwefi by continuously striking her and disturbing what ought to be a festival day. In consequence, his violation of religious and cultural norms unfolded under the cover of his internal struggles. Only this time, his aggression exceeded physical force as he snatched his gun and pointed towards her after she muttered a single remark about his inaptitude to shoot. Fortunately for her, he narrowly missed his target.

First and foremost, it is fundamental to explore the mental condition Okonkwo was in, prior to the violent outburst. In fact, the author deliberately described his feeling of discomfort due to the occurring festival, as his words convey, "...Okonkwo could never become as enthusiastic over feasts as most people...he was always uncomfortable sitting around for days waiting for a feast or getting over it. He would be very much happier working on his farm" (Achebe 37). Considering that he was a man who despised idleness due to his traumatic experiences and one who measured his worth upon his achievements and physical exertion, he could not feel at ease with a prolonged unproductivity despite it being for a communal celebration. He believed his self-image was threatened when being estranged from a physical performance.

In addition, his fear of being labelled as indolent prevented him from participating in the collective joy, for he associated joy with tranquillity and rest which are features he considered inappropriate for a man. Thus, his rigid identity revolved around austerity and erasing any space for amusement in his life. Nevertheless, his incessant preoccupations blinded him to the cultural significance of communal rituals which intended to glorify their collective spirit rather than individual competence. The latter revealed how his rigidity alienated him from the very traditions that identified his society.

The narrative proceeds with the observation that "Okonkwo, who had been walking about aimlessly in his compound in suppressed anger, suddenly found an outlet"

(Achebe 38) which implied his search for the tiniest excuse that would enable him to exteriorize his internal tension and eventually reaffirm his authority. Hence, it was only through the violent subjugation of his wife, that Okonkwo restored his sense of masculinity he feared had temporarily diminished.

This domestic quarrel also conveyed a profound meaning that introduces the readers even more to the complex character of Okonkwo. On the surface, it may appear as an appalling illustration of the character's inner fury that he cannot seem to control. But at a deeper level, it is noticed that Okonkwo did not feel any sense of culpability nor did he consider his actions as a transgression of laws or customs. According to him, it is a paramount masculine duty to assert his authority over his household and remind them who the superior force is, even if it results in threatening repercussions. Therefore, his aiming the weapon at his wife perfectly symbolized his desire to intimidate her and demonstrate who held power and control in the domestic hierarchy.

In consequence, the violent incidents vividly portrayed the shattering consequences of Okonkwo's severe misconception of masculinity. His intention behind his brutal domination over his family was that it would proclaim him the most virile figure in his community and would shelter him from any potential disrepute or accusations of fragility. Unconsciously, he revealed his inabilities to manage his temperament and the very insecurities he attempted to conceal which were conversely exposed as signs of weakness. Okonkwo's physical violence affirmed his desire to hold superiority and authority over his wives which transitioned into a more symbolic sense.

2.3.2.2. Belittling and Devaluation of Women

Okonkwo's masculinity was predominately manifested in his conception about women. In the course of his life, Okonkwo is noticed to have developed a sense of despise and disdain towards everything effeminate which affected the consideration he held upon his wives. This view was ultimately reinforced by the Igbo confinement of women within domestic practicalities only and their dismissal of their independent identities.

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Thus, they were minimized to subordinate roles who solely exist to serve the masculine figure of their house. Through multiple encounters with his wives, Okonkwo expressed this deeply cultural devaluation of women which he internalized and applied beyond what was necessary.

Achebe exemplified the protagonist's conception of women through the figurative comment that "he trembled with the desire to conquer and subdue. It was like the desire for woman" (Achebe 42). This illustration exposes the extent to which Okonkwo's vision of women is solely linked to possession and domination. According to him, women were considered as inferior individuals to be controlled rather than being life companions which reflected the male-centric institution of their society. Because his society granted the male gender more substantial accountabilities, he seemed to develop the assurance and conceived right to subdue women. Additionally, by comparing a conquest to the notion of womanhood, the author highlights the diminution of women to entities of male control which confirms his twisted notion that masculinity is constructed upon subjugation and denigration of the female gender.

The contempt for the feminine was incorporated in Okonkwo from his childhood as he witnessed the disgraceful association his father has endured, as Achebe shared,

...even now he still remembered how he had suffered when a playmate had told him that his father was agbala. That was how Okonkwo first came to know that agbala was not only another name for a woman, it could also mean a man who had taken no title (13).

From this instant, Okonkwo carried the social association of a woman to dishonor and failure. For this reason, Okonkwo's contempt for men without titles as expressed in his declaration that "He had no patience with unsuccessful men", parallels his treatment of his wives, considering both of them as devoid of worth and undeserving of respect (Achebe 4). Thus, he presumed he could escape his father's pathway and die as an

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honoured man by despising everything connected with effeminacy, even if it implied the disparagement of his wives.

This sentiment was further illustrated in Okonkwo's reaction to his wife's seeking of clarification for the duration of Ikemefuna's staying, "Do what you are told, woman. When did you become one of the *ndichie* of Umuofia?" (Achebe 14). Through this interaction, the writer described Okonkwo's conception that women are not allowed to inquire much and should content herself to obey her man's words. Also, by mocking her as one of the *Ndichie* for her simple request which he projected as an overreach of authority, he asserted his dominant position within the house by reminding her of the social norm that women must not hold empowered positions. This ridicule comment shed light on his rigid definition of masculinity which transformed any articulation of female agency, even if it is a rightful inquiry, into a threat to his authority.

This falsified ideology may have originated from his reflection that his opinionated voice was given enough relevance within communal affairs only when he achieved communal recognition due to his efforts. Thus, given the fact that a woman could never attain such a high success as a man, her opinion should remain disregarded and deprived of the right to occur which is symbolized through the wife's immediate surrender to utter anymore words "...Nwoye's mother took Ikemefuna to her hut and asked no more questions" (Achebe 14).

As opposed to Okonkwo's dismissive stance towards his wives, Achebe displayed the marital unity between Ndulue and Ozoemena as a model of interdependence and mutual respect within the village. His friend recalled, "It was always said that Ndulue and Ozoemena had one mind...He could not do anything without telling her" which prompted Okonkwo's remark, "I thought he was a strong man in his youth" (Achebe 68). This highlights that Okonkwo was unable to categorize a man who attributed this much consideration to his wife as a powerful one, for he so rigidly adhered to social gendered roles that he diminished his wives to trivial identifiers such as 'first wife' or 'Nwoye's mother' which confined their identity solely to domestic

and maternal functions. However, his friend's reply, "he was indeed. He led Umuofia to war in those days" revealed that the old man's affection towards his wife did not undermine his credibility within society nor did it prevent him from upholding masculine duties (Achebe 68). Consequently, Okonkwo's inflexible conception of masculinity, once more collided with the communal ideals that embraced mutual respect and harmonious unity between spouses.

Okonkwo's physical and psychological mistreatments towards his wives were impactful consequences of his distorted notion of masculinity. Influenced by his communal norms, he believed manhood could only be achieved through an exaggerated exercise of authority and belittlement towards them. Thus, his terror of appearing effeminate in the eyes of his community manifested in his erratic behaviour which ironically revealed his inner frailty beneath his rigid façade. Furthermore, this extended beyond his marital relationships as it shaped his paternal role.

2.3.3. Relationship with his Children

Okonkwo's interactions with his offspring reflected his obsession with social recognition along with his determination to maintain his stern demeanour despite the challenges he endured. Influenced by the social ideology, the major character deliberately exhibited his gendered preference for male children. According to his society, having a son signified the existence of a successor of his legacy and a preserver of his earned prosperity which favoured his gender. So, they relied upon the role of parents to acquire an education founded on the cored cultural values for the primordial sake of preserving their identity. Consequently, Okonkwo was immersed in this pressure which strove him to educate the future heads of families through the embodiment of the expected masculine ideals. Yet, the method through which he sought to fulfil this duty was marked by a regime of violence and threatening instructions.

Okonkwo's brutal approach to education was most clearly reflected in his treatment of Nwoye who worried his father for his seeming idleness. He represented

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Okonkwo's highest anxieties since he possessed the very quality that shattered the life of his father Unoka. Thus, he ought to amend his shortcoming through a strict discipline that lately affected his psyche, as Achebe describes,

Okonkwo's first son, Nwoye, was then twelve years old but was already causing his father great anxiety for his incipient laziness. At any rate, that was how it looked to his father, and he sought to correct him by constant nagging and beating. And so Nwoye was developing into a sad-faced youth (13-14).

The author underlined that Nwoye's so-called laziness appears to be merely a projection of Okonkwo's personal severe standards rather than an objective character trait. Moreover, he transposed the habitual aggression he applied in wrestling, communal affairs, and household authority into his paternal role, presuming it would yield similar results. Yet, his child's reaction manifested in psychological disturbances rather than obedience.

Furthermore, Okonkwo's scolding of his son highlights his severe pedagogy. When he rhetorically asked him "Do you think you are cutting up yams for cooking?" he minimized his son's efforts by claiming its uselessness and nonconformity to the masculine standards of yam cultivation (Achebe 32). His furious deception eventually drove him to threaten and intimidate his son through his words; "If you split another yam of this size, I shall break your jaw. You think you are still a child. I began to own a farm at your age" (Achebe 32-33). The protagonist denigrated his son's endeavours by highlighting his own precedent glorious achievements that socially represent the standardized masculinity. Okonkwo could not restrain himself from violently menacing his son for the reason that these farming skills were considered as compulsory markers of competence for any household provider. Thus, this preconceived failure reinforced his trepidation that Nwoye might develop into a man who is unable to fulfil the masculine duties his society commanded.

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Nonetheless, the sole instant Nwoye was behaving according to his father's expectations was when he was tutored by Ikemefuna, the young boy who Okonkwo yearningly dreamed to have as a son for his exemplary skills. Away from the dreary atmosphere his father put him through, Ikemefuna adopted a contrastive approach founded on patience and care which propelled Nwoye to ignite interest in his father's masculine stories he once loathed and to engage in the communal tasks he ought to perform. This expeditious evolution under Ikemefuna's influence was the living proof of Okonkwo's ineffectiveness of his violent pedagogy in nurturing strong masculine qualities in his son which ironically revealed instead the necessity of a gentler model of guidance. Thus, in seeking to safeguard Nwoye from social disrepute, his brutality only alienated him from the cultural identity he was meant to assimilate.

In addition, the conception of masculinity according to Okonkwo included a complete suppression of gentle emotions. For the reason that his society has taught them from infancy that women tend to be more emotional than men, which led him to deduce that he was utterly deprived of the right to articulate sentiments in any given situation. For instance, his admiration for Ikemefuna, though stemming from this boy's productivity and wittiness rather than genuine affectionate care, was never outwardly expressed as he sought to maintain his stoic paternal image, as Achebe explains,

...Okonkwo himself became very fond of the boy inwardly of course. Okonkwo never showed any emotion openly, unless it be the emotion of anger. To show affection was a sign of weakness; the only thing worth demonstrating was strength (28).

Okonkwo found himself locked in an ongoing inner conflict as he attempted by all means to remain stoic to any obstacles he endured which in reality distorted the ideals his society inscribed. The Igbo society has never ordained men to suppress their entire humanity, if anything they did esteem features of courage and mental resilience, but above all they prioritized the paternal duty of security. This is reflected through the episode of Ikemefuna's sacrifice, where an elder insistently advised Okonkwo not to

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witness the execution of the young boy given the emotional weight of this sight, expressed through his words “That boy calls you father. Do not bear a hand in his death” (Achebe 57). Yet, Okonkwo wanted to prevent his action from being perceived as a form of weakness which drove him to defy this counsel. To make matters worse, Okonkwo even killed his adoptive son after the latter turned to him seeking a paternal empathy which betrayed both the relationship forged with the young boy, but also the communal expectations that highly regarded the paternal role. Ultimately, this act revealed Okonkwo's relentless need to prove his masculinity in order to preserve his social image, an obsession that thrust him into destructive expressions of manhood.

Okonkwo's reaction to the precedent traumatic episode further exposed the emotional restraint that controlled his actions. He rebuked his own misery instead of allowing himself to mourn, as he puts it,

When did you become a shivering old woman... you, who are known in all the nine villages for your valor in war? How can a man who has killed five men in battle fall to pieces because he has added a boy to their number? Okonkwo, you have become a woman indeed (Achebe 65).

The protagonist's view of masculinity led him to relate vulnerability to femininity and thus consider it as a deplorable sign of weakness. Hence, he imputed the suppression of emotions as a core male virtue when in reality humane sentiments, such as grief, were never condemned as dishonourable for a man in his society. Okonkwo ensured to transmit this extremist value to his son Nwoye which is reflected through his reaction to Nwoye's grief upon Ikemefuna. As the author recounts “Nwoye overheard it and burst into tears, whereupon his father beat him heavily” which defined Okonkwo's belief that masculinity requires emotional hardness (Achebe 57). In consequence, Nwoye developed an internal fear and even despise towards his father which drove his future actions.

Okonkwo considered his male child as a mere opportunity to erase the disgraceful legacy of his father and produce a more thriving line. Thus, in his obsessive determination, he convinced himself that his oppressive methods of education could only mould his son Nwoye into the ideal model of masculinity upheld by their society. Nevertheless, the major character was unaware of the psychological impact it will have on his child's worldview as his violent conducts estranged him from his father along with his culture that appeared to embrace such cruelty. In reality, these values stemmed less from the societal authentic expectations than from Okonkwo's own misconception of masculinity shaped by his traumatic dread of failure.

2.4. Okonkwo's Downfall

The latest stages of Okonkwo's life were marked by pivotal hardships which assessed the stability of his cored values that he sought to defend during his entire existence. The principles that had initially contributed to his thrive gradually encountered uncontrollable circumstances that would determine his fate. These critical junctures challenged both his potent position in society as well as the communal ideas that he devoted his life to preserve.

The initial turning point occurred after Okonkwo inadvertently killed a clansman. He was then punished from the divinities by an exile to his mother's homeland for seven years. Yet, the detail that needs to be examined here is not the incident itself but rather his frustrated response in regard to this cultural punishment. The exile itself was meant to be a restorative act that purified the community according to the supreme gods who had to be unquestionably obeyed. However, Okonkwo expressed a strong dissent regarding this condemnation which implied a lack of respect towards the communal traditions that valorised the motherland as a source of solace, as reflected in his uncle's wise words,

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...when there is sorrow and bitterness he finds refuge in his motherland. Is it right that you, Okonkwo, should bring to your mother a heavy face and refuse to be comforted? Be careful or you may displease the dead. (Achebe 134).

Okonkwo was so dispirited by his personal misery and the societal humiliation that he began to resent the traditional rulings that governed his destiny, a behaviour that utterly contrasts with his longing to conform to communal ideals.

Furthermore, this despair even came to affect his responsibilities as being the head of the family. In fact, his excessive pride distracted him from protecting and comforting his kindred which could endanger the stability of the whole as his uncle phrased it, "Your duty is to comfort your wives and children and take them back to your fatherland after seven years. But if you allow sorrow to weigh you down and kill you, they will all die in exile." (Achebe 134). Okonkwo failed to fulfil the manly duty of protection ascribed to him and be an example of courage and resilience in front of his family. Hence, the protagonist's inner turmoil, guided by his intransigent notion of manhood obstructed him from upholding both his private and societal duties prescribed by his culture. Eventually, it exposed the repercussions of a masculinity defined more by apprehension and rigidity than by communal harmony.

After Okonkwo's return from exile, he confronted a society that shared no resemblance to the one he was raised in. The arrival of the Christian missionaries and their victorious spreading of religious and cultural ideologies disturbed the traditional structures that defined their notions of authority, masculinity, and communal devotion. For a man who formed his entire identity around his own adherence of the deeply cored social values and around his pursuit of success, these changes were considered as potential threats to his culture and eventually to himself.

Okonkwo's conception of masculinity was grounded upon the conservation of the traditional social order and the assertion of his authority. In fact, he was eagerly awaiting for his return for the mere purpose to pursue his achievements and elevate his

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social standing, as Achebe confirms, "He was determined that his return should be marked by his people. He would return with a flourish, and regain the -seven wasted years." (171). However, when confronted with the drastic changes of the social structural system, he projected the loss of his accomplishments that were once highly regarded in his community and became worthless according to the novel culture. Thus, Okonkwo's fight for his communal traditions concealed an extensive personal battle to restore his lost masculine authority that defined his identity.

Moreover, the villagers swiftly conceded to the novel culture and some were even convinced to convert to Christianity through persuasive attempts from the missionaries, among them was Nwoye. In fact, Nwoye's conversion was not forcefully imposed by the Christians, but rather internally adhered through compassion and reasonable arguments. The new religion offered Nwoye the emotional and psychological comfort that he lacked from Okonkwo's rigid education. Christianity was the emotional refuge that healed the very traumas that his father implemented through his violent and intimidating pedagogy, as the author narrates,

It was the poetry of the new religion, something felt in the marrow. The hymn...seemed to answer a vague and persistent question that haunted his young soul-...the question of Ikemefuna who was killed. He felt a relief within as the hymn poured into his parched soul. (Achebe 147).

Hence, Nwoye's alienation from his father's culture demonstrated Okonkwo's failure to forge a man who was intended to embody the societal masculine ideals as a result to his excessive obsession of societal validation.

Moreover, Okonkwo demonstrated his impatience under the disconcerting sight of the clansmen who transformed into effeminate fearful individuals, as the writer reclaimed, "...he mourned for the warlike men of Umuofia, who had so unaccountably become soft like women." (Achebe 183). Therefore, he impulsively killed a messenger who interrupted the communal gathering that aimed to establish a potential solution that

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would rescue their village. This violent action was supposed to be a heroic resistance and a rebellious incitement against the intruders when it actually betrayed the cored principles of the culture he was claiming to defend. In fact, Okonkwo's conduct was presented as a form of radical individualism in its disregard for the collective consent and deliberation which were highly valued in the Umuofian judicial principles. Consequently, the protagonist tragically desecrated his sacred tradition due to his extremist interpretation of the communal forbearance and negotiation towards the colonized threat as a sign of submissiveness and effeminacy which were pathologically intolerant for him.

Thus, Okonkwo foreshadowed the inevitable victory of the missionaries which led him to desperately commit suicide, revealing much about his obstinate character. Okonkwo perceived the erosion of his authority over his compound and community as the loss of his entire identity for his definition of manhood resided in it. His suicide can be interpreted as both a symbolic and literal detachment from a society that no longer recognized his reputable position. Nevertheless, it also exposed the inner void of his apparent tough character as his masculinity was only tied to dominative actions led by the fear of frailty and was consequently unable to adapt to social and cultural transformation.

Okonkwo's suicide further represented his fatal transgression of the communal order, as one of the villagers elucidated, "It is an abomination for a man to take his own life. It is an offense against the Earth, and a man who commits it will not be buried by his clansmen, His, body is evil, and only strangers may touch it." (Achebe 207). This epitomizes the final irony of Okonkwo's trajectory, for he spent his entire existence trying to conform to the sacred traditions of his ancestors to become the ideal Igbo man, yet his life culminated with a severe violation of his cultural customs through an act that was considered as the ultimate symbol of weakness. Thus, his suicide did not only strip his death of any heroic meaning but also dragged his family into his disgrace as his body was no longer honoured according to his tradition. This way, he hindered the legacy of

reputability and cultural template of masculinity that he aspired to build, leaving behind a shattered portrayal of failure and shame that his family had to carry.

2.5. Conclusion

The protagonist developed a rigid conception of masculinity that engendered both his rise and his collapse. Besides the success it granted him, his notion of masculinity affected gravely his private relationships. His harsh treatment towards his wives and children, his repression of gentle emotions, and his incapacity to console his family during a challenging period all illustrate a man who mistook aggression and emotional stoicism for strength, considering it as a conformity to cored communal values. In neglecting the principles of wisdom, gentleness, and communal responsibility, valorised in the Igbo culture, he limited masculinity to violence and authority, thereby estranging himself from his own community. It is also noteworthy that these conducts were merely a projection of his inner fear of having a similar reputation to his father which produced a growing obsession with societal validation.

Moreover, Okonkwo's crumbling was presented as the imminent repercussion of his distorted and rigid conception of masculinity. His disapproval of the exile, impotence to adapt to the abrupt changes imposed by colonial influence, alienation of his son, and his impending suicide all exposed his tragic irony. While he attempted to conform to the image of the ideal man that society expected from him, he continuously disrespected the communal values required for a true man. He failed to be the vigorous protector in the eyes of his community and allowed his traumas and excessive pride to govern his conducts which estranged him from both his family and his clan. His final self-destructive act, convicted as disgraceful by Igbo tradition, ultimately soiled the legacy he sought to conserve and revealed the frailty of a masculinity founded on impulsive violence and obsessive assertion of authority which were conflicted with the cored communal values.

General Conclusion

General Conclusion

This dissertation sought to examine the dangers of a distorted conception of masculinity through the portrayal of Okonkwo's path in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958). Through an investigation of his role as a husband, father, and communal leader, the analysis was able to prove that his downfall was not coincidental as it resulted from his fear-driven, rigid understanding of what distinguishes a man.

All along the chapters, the protagonist's conception of masculinity lied in an obsessive desire to be the ideal man in the eyes of his community through brutality and assertion of authority for the sake of preventing the same disgrace that befell his father and cultivating a favorable public image, one that would be opposed to failure and weakness. Within his household, he ruled with intimidation and neglected the importance of tenderness in his treatment towards his wives and offspring since he failed to recognize the effectiveness of a gentler guidance as noticed in Ikemefuna's influence on his son Nwoye. From a wider perspective, it implied an opposition to the cultural balance valorised by the Igbo society; a balance where force was tempered with empathy, patience, and wisdom. His incapacity to consolidate this balance and dissociate rashness from bravery through his impulsivity had gradually estranged him from his son, his community and lastly from himself.

A unifying motif of Okonkwo's life circumstances is his selective conformity to the Igbo traditional principles. Rather than adhering to the cultural model of manhood grounded upon collective spirit and reverence for the gods and ancestral customs, he instead clung only to the procurement of social titles, affluence, and patriarchal dominance as a form of masculinity driven by individualistic ambition. This orientation reconceived manhood as a self-centered endeavor of social image detached from the consideration of the community whose approval initially attributed meaning to that power. Thus, Achebe clarifies that Okonkwo's tragedy was more ideological than individual, for he conflated pride for honor and isolation for force, and in the process he offended the very cultural principles he sought to defend which precipitated a series of tragic events that culminated in his downfall.

General Conclusion

Eventually, his suicide symbolized the paradox of his trajectory. As he committed the most execrable abomination according to the Igbo tradition, he incurred shame upon himself, his family, and his ancestors, forfeiting the legacy he had long aspired to establish. The protagonist's demise illustrated that within the Igbo culture masculinity is socially validated through collective cohesion and communal respect rather than emotional stoicism and individual prosperity. Therefore, Achebe's novel highlights the failure of the distortion of masculinity when being fueled by apprehension of social image and a rejection of communal interdependence.

Okonkwo's story appears to be a personal tragedy on the surface while it delivers a profound cultural morale. It highlights that the strength of a man cannot be detached from the strength of his community, and in the event that this affiliation is severed, both the individual and the principles he represents are destined to fall apart.

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