Construction of Masculinities through Stereotypical Masculine Attributes in THINGS FALL APART

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Abstract
This paper is an account of an attempt to explore the ways in which masculinities have been constructed through stereotypical masculine attributes in the novel Things Fall Apart by Chinua Achebe. This study is significant as it tries to probe into the structure of the language and textual discourse of the novel to find out the ways in which masculinities have been constructed in the Igbo culture. The theoretical framework is drawn from Gender Studies and social theories of Constructionism and Masculinities. The present research is predominantly qualitative in nature as the data are based on the text of the novel, so in order to get the meanings and interpretations of the text Textual Analysis is selected as a technique for data analysis. While analyzing the stereotypical masculine attributes, the analysis clearly indicates that the concepts of manliness and masculinities are not fixed naturally rather these are the construction of the minds of the people. It also confirms that the masculine attributes and the ideas of conventional manliness are purely the constructs of a society which are asserted to maintain men’s supremacy over women.

Keywords: Masculinities; Gender; Masculine attributes; Constructionism; Textual analysis; Social Constructs

1. Introduction
This paper explores the ways in which masculinities have been constructed through stereotypical masculine attributes in the novel Things Fall Apart (Chinua Achebe, 1930-2013). Things Fall Apart is a milestone in African Literature. It has achieved the position of the archetypal modern African novel in English, and is read in Nigeria and throughout Africa. The present study is significant in a way that it tries to probe into the structure of the language and textual discourse of the novel to find out the ways in which masculinities, as presented in it, have been constructed. The research emphasizes the fact that masculinity is generally assumed to be a monolithic unproblematic entity, with patriarchy attaining a universal status as the single cause of the oppression of women, while it is not as simple as it seems. Here it is quite relevant to point out researcher’s assumption that masculinity exists in plurality of forms. There is no
fixed set of attributes that can be labeled as masculinity. Instead, masculinity is theorized as unstable and multiple; decentered and subjective to changing contexts.

Until recently, masculinity as a field of study has tended to be absent from mainstream academic research. Earlier studies of gender relations, in which a unitary notion of masculinity was often employed, largely concentrated on women and girls. But this study explores how masculinity is constructed and represented in literary texts by the writers. Moreover, it is a multidisciplinary study as it draws upon theory and research from Gender Studies, Men’s Studies, Social Anthropology and Literary Criticism. Various strands from these disciplines are interwoven to understand the richness and complexity of masculinities in Igbo society as constructed and represented by an African writer. But this paper is an attempt to find out the ways and patterns through which Chinua Achebe has constructed masculinities through Stereotypical Masculine Attributes in Things Fall Apart.

II. Theoretical Framework

A strong linkage is observed between gender studies and the construction of masculinities. Both are interconnected and here the focal point is to highlight this interconnectivity. For this purpose, this section briefly defines the arena of Gender Studies, Masculinities and Constructionism.

First of all, the basics of gender studies are discussed. According to Healey (2003), “Gender Studies is a field of interdisciplinary study which analyses race, ethnicity, sexuality and location”. Gender study has many different forms. One view exposed by the philosopher Simone de Beauvoir (1949) said: "One is not born a woman, one becomes one". This view proposes that the term gender should be used to refer to the social and cultural constructions of masculinities and femininities, not to the state of being male or female in its entirety.

Gender as a technical term is much younger than the technical term sex. It was introduced as a reaction to the essentialist way of thinking that femininity and masculinity are biologically determined and thus fixed by nature. Being born male or female has far-reaching consequences for an individual. It affects how we act in the world and how the world treats us (Talbot, 1998 cited in Hussain, 2003). It is thoroughly embedded in our actions, our beliefs, our desires and in our institutions. As Eckert and McConnel-Ginet (2003) observe:

*It is deeply embedded in every aspect of society - in our institutions, in public places, in art, clothing, and movement. Gender is embedded in experience, in all settings from government to games. It is embedded in the family, the neighborhood, church, school, the media, walking down the street, eating in a restaurant, going to restroom. (P. 33)*

*It is so thoroughly embedded in all aspects of our lives that it seems to us to be completely natural (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003).*

The distinction between gender and sex was first made by Oakley (1985), who defined sex and gender in these terms:
‘Sex’ is a word that refers to the biological differences between male and female: the visible differences in genitalia, the related difference in procreative function. ‘Gender’ however is a matter of culture: it refers to the social classification into ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’. (Cited in Colebrook, 2004)

In this definition by Oakley sex is represented in terms of chromosomal, chemical, anatomical characteristics, which make us either male or female, and gender as socially constructed masculinity and femininity.

Glover and Kaplan (2000, p.1) define femininity as a ‘set of attributes ascribed to biologically sexed females’. Stereotypically feminine attributes include being emotional, demure, affectionate, sympathetic, sensitive, soft-spoken, warm, tender, childlike, gentle, pretty, willowy, submissive, understanding and compassionate. These feminine attributes are expressed through female gender roles. So femininity is concerned with the constitution of women’s subjectivities and organization of their lives. Talbot (1995) elaborates the same point in this way, ‘it is a particular structuring of social space that spans across institutions and that is a key factor in the constitution of women’s subjectivities. It discursively organizes women’s lines, even impinging on their bodies’ (p. 144).

Masculinity refers to gender roles or behaviors traditionally associated with males. Stereotypical masculine attributes are: strength, bravery, sexual aggressiveness, unemotional, independence, dominance, competitiveness, decisiveness, egotistical and adventurous.

If a man deviates from these masculine attributes and adopts feminine attributes, he is described as effeminate, foppish or sissy, which is a sign of weakness. As Glover and Kaplan (2000, p. 60-61) remark, ‘the differences between men and women had to be sharply emphasized and feminine traits had to be kept firmly in their proper place in men, they were a sign of weakness’.

Secondly, it is relevant at this time to expose the multiplicity of masculinities. Masculinity is not a fixed and single entity. There are multiple forms and shapes of masculinity that is why it is now considered as masculinities. Collinson et al., (1996) observe that, the concept of multiple masculinities has been used to refer to the temporal, spatial and cultural diversity of masculinity. It tries to convey the way in which specific forms of masculinity are constructed and persist in relation both to femininity and to other forms of masculinity (Caurigan et al., 1985).

Different masculinities are embedded in relations of power, and particular forms may be characterized as hegemonic or subordinate in relation to one another (Connell 1995).

In turn these masculinities are not fixed, but continually shifting. Multiplicity and diversity are relevant not only to the analysis of masculinity, but also to the different forms and locations of workplaces, the sites of work and of masculinity. These sites will vary, for example, according to occupation, industry, culture, class and type of organization. Thus multiple masculinities interconnect with multiple sites. (Cited in Mairtin Mac An Ghail 1996)
One type of masculinity is hyper-masculinity which is a psychological term for the exaggeration of male stereotypical behavior, such as an emphasis on physical strength, aggression, body hair, body odor, and virility.

Mosher and Sirkin (1984) have operationally defined hyper-masculinity or the "macho personality" as consisting of the following three variables:

- "callous sexual attitudes toward women",
- "the belief that violence is manly", and
- "the experience of danger as exciting".

Mosher et al. (1986) stated that research has found that hyper-masculinity is associated with sexual and physical aggression against women.

Another type is hegemonic masculinity which refers to the conviction in the existence of a culturally normative ideal of male behavior. Hegemonic masculinity posits that society strongly encourages men to personify this kind of masculinity. Connell (2005) argues that 'hegemonic masculinity is said to be marked by a tendency for the male to dominate other males and subordinate females. Proponents point to characteristics such as aggressiveness, strength, drive, ambition, and self-reliance, which they argue are encouraged in males but discouraged in females in contemporary Western society, as evidence of the existence of hegemonic masculinity. (Pierce et al. 1996)

The theory has been criticized. Connell et al (1995) state that its basic sources were "feminist theories of patriarchy and the related debates over the role of men in transforming patriarchy," and that "hegemonic masculinities can be constructed that do not correspond closely to the lives of any actual men". Wetherell et al (1999) state that, “it offers a vague and imprecise account of the social psychological reproduction of male identities".

Connell's conception of hegemony draws on Gramsci's (1971) depiction of the wars of position and characteristic of social formations. Hegemonic ideologies preserve, legitimate and naturalize the interests of the powerful marginalizing and subordinating the claims of other groups.

Domestic Masculinities are still considered as third type of masculinities. Christine Heward (1996), states that families are the first site where masculinities are constructed. While fathers are the first role models for their son's masculinities and take an active part in shaping their sons' contraction of masculinity, outcomes are problematic, negotiated and contested. (Cited in Mairtin Mac An Ghaill, 1996)

Social Constructionism is the third concerned aspect covered in this theoretical framework. The Oxford concise dictionary of sociology defines the term as; "Social Constructionism is a general term sometimes applied to theories that emphasize the socially created nature of social life." (Marshall, 1994) and also is a theory that social reality is a creation of the interaction of individuals and groups".

Social constructs are generally understood to be the by-products of countless human choices rather than laws resulting from divine will or nature. This is not usually
taken to imply a radical anti-determinism, however. Vivien (1995) argues that ‘social constructionism is usually opposed to essentialism, which instead defines specific phenomena in terms of inherent and transhistorical essences independent of conscious beings that determine the categorical structure of reality.’

Ian Hacking (1999) noted in his book The Social Construction of What? that social construction talk is regularly in reference not only to worldly items, like things and facts but also to beliefs about them.”

Before starting the analysis, it is very relevant to present and discuss some of the social constructs of African masculinities which have been found in Barker’s (2005) work entitled Young Men and the Construction of Masculinity in Sub Saharan Africa: Implications for HIV/AIDS, Conflict, and Violence. This paper has some assumptions about the socialization process of boys and men in Africa through which they construct their ideas and personalities according to the social standards regarding manhood and masculinities.

Barker et al, (2005) suggest that a gender analysis of young men must take into account the plurality of masculinities in Africa. Versions of manhood in Africa are: (i) socially constructed; (ii) fluid over time and in different settings; and (iii) plural. There is no typical young man in sub-Saharan Africa and no distinct African version of manhood. There are numerous African masculinities, urban and rural and changing historically, including descriptions of manhood associated with war, or being warriors and others linked with farming or cattle-herding. There are aboriginal definitions and versions of manhood, defined by tribal and cultural group practices, and new versions of manhood shaped by Islam and Christianity, and also by Western influences, including the global media.

The chief order or social requirement for achieving manhood in Africa is achieving some level of economic independence, employment or income, and consequently starting a family. In much of Africa where bride price is commonplace, marriage and family formation are directly attached to having income and property. Men’s social recognition along with their sense of manhood, suffers when they lack work.

Achieving manhood in the African context mostly depends on an older man, one who holds more power decides when a young man is able to achieve socially recognized manhood. Initiation practices, or rites of passage, some of which embrace male circumcision, are central factors in the socialization of boys and men throughout the region. For young men in Africa, as for many young men worldwide, sexual experience is commonly associated with initiation into manhood and achieving a collectively recognized manhood. Violence and coercion which include verbal threats and forced sex are common features of young people’s sexual relationships in sub-Saharan Africa.

The socialization of young men in Africa must be studied within the perspective of social change, urbanization and political upheaval, including civil unrest and in some countries, the lack of working national-level social institutions. Urbanization and the spreading out of formal education, and the increased enrollment of girls in public education, are leading to great changes in gender roles. Various studies and researches
confirm that many young men simultaneously hold traditional and rigid opinions about gender alongside some new ideas about women’s equality.

In the end it is assumed that language is a powerful determinant of reality. James Britton (1975) states “the objects and events of the world do not represent themselves to us ready classified. The categories into which they are divided are the categories into which we divide them” (P.23 (Cited in Dalespender 1980)).

Here Dalespender (1980) makes an addition that, “my question which arises from this statement is not whether it is an accurate assessment, for I readily accept that language is a powerful determinant of reality. But who is the ‘we’ to whom James Britton refers? Who are these people who make the world and what are the principles behind their division, organization and classification.

Although not explicitly stated, Britton is referring to males. It is men who have constructed the world which women must inhabit, and if women are to begin to make their own world, it is necessary that they must understand some of the ways in which such creation is accomplished. This means exploring the relationship of language and reality.

Literary texts as a part of academic discourse carry great social, cultural and ideological influences to their readers. The purpose of applying the theory of constructionism, which is discussed in this section, to such literary texts as Things Fall Apart is to delve deeper into the mind of the writers to expose the ways in which they fabricate their texts and construct meanings into them.

### III. Research Methodology

Textual Analysis is selected as a technique for data analysis. Textual analysis is a technique for collecting and analyzing contents of the text. When it is applied on a text, we make an educated guess at some of the most probable interpretations that might be made of that text. This method of analysis goes back nearly a century. At the first meeting at German Sociological Society, in 1910, Max Weber suggested using it to study news (Krippendorff, 1980). Textual analysis, an element of close reading, is described by Rockwell (2003) as exploring, ‘the question of the relationship between how we represent texts, how we see them, and our theories of textuality’ (2009). Generally, textual analysis seeks to recognize patterns within the text, such as concordance or unity, meaning and truth.

Within a given text lie many opportunities for elucidation or analysis. Close reading is a fundamental element of the Textual Analysis. It reveals much about context, meaning or use of language within it. The text has a great deal to state about the argument the author is making and why the argument becomes convincing. One needs only take the time to delve into the content of the text to look at the structure and the organizing schemas or discourses in which the argument is framed.

### A. Delimitation of the Study

This study has aimed at bringing the construction of masculinities into light which are discursively projected through language, institutions, religious and traditional beliefs and practices by analyzing the postmodern masculine ideas presented in Achebe’s Things
Fall Apart. Taking insights from the theoretical framework; and a close reading of the text enabled us to interpret the data thoroughly by focusing on the topics like construction of masculinities, division of gender roles, and conscious structuring of the text. Analysis may also be extended to different sections according to the topics and aspects found in the text of the novel and these subsections of data analysis may be as follows:

a. Construction of masculinities through stereotypical masculine attributes  
b. Construction of masculinities through different themes  
c. Construction of masculinities through language  
d. Construction of masculinities through structure of the novel

Figure 1

But the main emphasis is on tracing out the construction of masculinities only through stereotypical masculine attributes in Things Fall Apart; and also to capture the social positioning of men and women of Nigeria in postmodern era. While doing the analysis, I shall try to interpret the ways in which Okonkwo lives his masculinity, how he tries to assert it and the constraints he encounters while doing so.

IV. Data Analysis  
A. Construction of Masculinities through Stereotypical Masculine Attributes  
The novel Things Fall Apart by Chinua Achebe is a story that opens reader’s mind to an entirely different way of living in a Nigerian village. Achebe was born in Nigeria in 1930; perhaps this is why he writes a whole book on a Nigerian Village and introduces to us the ways of life for the Nigerian people. From the first page of the book to the last, Achebe allows the reader to enter the mind of his main character Okonkwo. Okonkwo is the leader of his village and is much respected for his many achievements. A number of a stereotypical and conventional attributes of masculinity are shown by Achebe in many of his characters. Here the objective of the analysis is to figure out how such attributes contribute to the construction of masculinities throughout the novel.

B. Physical Strength  
Traditionally speaking, the very first and striking characteristic of a man’s masculinity is considered his physical strength and power. Strong body and powerful image of a man is similarly appreciated in Igbo society. Achebe starts representing his main character Okonkwo through his physical strength and power:
Okonkwo’s fame had grown like a bush-fire in the haumattan. He was tall and huge, and his bushy eyebrows and wide nose gave him a very severe look. He breathed heavily, and it was said that, when he slept, his wives and children in their houses could hear him breathe. (p.4)

Achebe describes Okonkwo’s manly look in the same manner as John Milton in “Paradise Lost” describes the grandeur of Satan through the hugeness of his bulk. Tall and huge body, bushy eyebrows, wide nose and heavy breaths are the signifiers of Okonkwo’s physical strength and power. As wrestling and fighting is the passions of Igbo culture for which strong and powerful men are the center of attraction. Achebe’s depiction of such powerful men becomes very vivid at certain points when he says:

Amalinze was a wily craftsman, but Okonkwo was as slippery as a fish in water. Every nerve and every muscle stood out on their arms, on their backs, and their thighs and one almost heard them stretching to breaking point. (P.4)

Okonkwo’s manly figure is also compared with the women and their physical strength as:

During the planting season Okonkwo worked daily on his farms from cockcrow until the chickens went to roost. He was a very strong man and rarely felt fatigue. But his wives and young children were not as strong, and so they suffered. (P.15)

C. Bravery

A man is always brave, he has courage to face to world, and he has the potential of being on top. Such notions are usually disseminated to assert bravery. Throughout the novel, the readers are reminded of Okonkwo’s bravery. It is him who finally defeated Amalinze the Cat, a wrestler unbeaten for seven years. He is also the first one to bring home a human head won in a fight in an inter-tribal war.

He was a man of Action, a man of war. Unlike his father he could stand the look of blood. In Umuofia’s latest war he was the first to bring home a human head. That was his fifth head; and he was not an old man yet. (P.11)

Furthermore, he is, at the end of the novel, not afraid to take on the white man singularly, if the clan fails to go to battle with him. He condemns Abame people for not being brave enough to fight back against the white men and says that:

I have also heard that Abame people were weak and foolish. Why did they not fight back? Had they no guns and machetes? We would be cowards to compare ourselves with the men of Abene. Their fathers had never dared to stand before our ancestors. We must fight these men and drive them from the land. (P.182)

Bravery for him is a quality so undeniably and inextricably linked to masculinity and the condition of manhood that he mourns for the warlike men of Umoufia, who have so unaccountably became soft like women during the time of his exile.

D. Beating and Violence

One thing that Okonkwo repeatedly does throughout the novel is beating his wives. Okonkwo never really has a legitimate reason as to why he beats his wives. It begins early in the book, in chapter four, when we experience the outcome of Okonkwo’s manly side.
Okonkwo's second wife is rewarded with a beating by Okonkwo when she cuts leaves off a banana tree. Okonkwo over exaggerated about the condition of a banana tree and took his anger out on his second wife. He gave her a beating and walked away satisfied.

Not only does Okonkwo beat his wives, he beats his son Nwoye as well. Because he fears weakness, Okonkwo is very demanding of his family. He seems to think his son is more like a woman than a man and finds him to be very lazy. Nwoye resembles his grandfather and that is something Okonkwo cannot deal with. On numerous occasions Okonkwo would hit his son and if Nwoye was lucky, he would just be threatened. One day, Nwoye was cutting up yams and Okonkwo was upset with the size of the pieces. He said to his son “if you split another yam of this size, I shall break your jaw” (p.34).

E. Aggression

Aggression, in its broadest sense, is behavior or a disposition towards behavior that is forceful, hostile or attacking. It has alternatively been defined as acts intended to increase relative social dominance. Aggression can take a variety of forms and can be physical or be communicated verbally or non-verbally.

Conventionally, aggressiveness is considered an important masculine trait in many cultures. Graham Dawson (1994) also observes that “Military virtues such as aggression, strength, courage and endurance have repeatedly been defined as the natural and inherent qualities of manhood. And his eminence as an aggressive man is exactly one of the ways in which Okonkwo asserts his manhood.

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. And he did pounce on people quite often. He had a slight stammer and whenever he was angry and could not get his word out quickly enough, he would use his fists. (P.4)

Most of the time, he exercises his aggression on his wives and children: Okonkwo ruled his household with a heavy hand. His wives, especially the youngest, lived in perpetual fear of his fiery temper, and so did his little children. (P.14)

His aggressive nature was not confined to his domestic sphere; rather he uses it publically to express his masculine dominance: As aggression is a behavior that is forceful hostile or attacking, Achebe uses it to construct masculinities with relating it to sexual desires and conquering the body of women.

Okonkwo cleared his throat and moved his feet to the beat of the drums. It filled him with fire it had always done from his youth. He trembled with the desire to conquer and subdue. It was like the desire for woman. (P.45)

F. Emotional Strength

A male must be emotionally strong. He must have good control over his feelings and emotions. He must not be the subject of his emotions. And this is what Achebe constructs in the personality of his male characters. He presents emotions as feminine trait, and the characters like Unoka, father of Okonkwo, is considered weak even by his
own son because of his emotions to music and talking which are considered female
domain of activities in Igbo culture.

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.
(P.30)

Okonkwo likes his daughter Ezinma but he never shows his affection to her
because he considers it a sign of weakness. He fears being effeminate and losing
community respect, he shies away from showing even his favorite child affection.

Okonkwo was especially fond of Ezinma. She looked very much like her mother,
who was once the village beauty. But his fondness only showed on very rare occasions.
(5.60)

As a typical masculine male, he always remains un-emotional and unmoved. We
see such a stance in Okonkwo even in chapter XI, where the priestess of Agbaala caries
Ezinma to her cave. Because he considers any show of emotion to be a weakness and as a
way of affirming his masculinity, Okonkwo does not follow the Priestess instantly, but
instead waits for a proper manly interval. His feelings for Ezinma nevertheless, are
strong. Despite his desire to become visible as manly and detached, he returns to the cave
times, grimly worried for his favorite daughter.

G. Warriorship
Warriorship is another masculine attribute through which the people of Umoufia
represent their masculinities. These tribes are great warriors and they love to fight and to
be violent against their enemies.

Though they have a man like Unoka too, who was never happy when it came to
wars? He was in fact a coward and could not bear the sight of blood. (P.6)

Yet on another extreme there is a man like Okonkwo, He was a man of action, a
man of war. Unlike his father he could stand the look of blood. In Umoufia’s latest war
he was the first to bring home a human head. That was his fifth head; and he was not an
old man yet. On great occasions such as the funeral of a village celebrity he drank his
palm wine from his first human head. (P.11)

It is due to the warriorship and courage of this ‘great’ man that he is respected not
only in his own society, but also honored in neighboring villages: Even the enemy clan
knew that. And so when Okonkwo of Umoufia arrived at Mtaino as the proud and
imperious emissary of war, he was treated with great honor and respect, and two days
later he returned home with a lad of fifteen and a young virgin. (P.13)

H. Prosperity and Wealth
Prosperity and wealth are source of attention and attraction for a man living in a
male dominant society like Umoufia where the value and worth of a man is judged
through his prosperity and wealth. If a man is not prosperous enough to support his wives
and children, he is laughed at by the other people. And it was the case with Unoka
because: Unoka was, of course, a debtor, and he owed every neighbor some money, from a few cowries to quite substantial amounts. (P.4)

And, Unoka, the grown-up was a failure. He was poor and his wife and children had barely enough to eat. People laughed at him because he was a loafer, and they swore never to lend him any more money (P.6)

A man’s prosperity is not limited to money only. Even there are some other elements and factors which constitute a man’s prosperity in Igbo society. The number of wives, number of children, number of barns and the number of titles are also considered as a source of prosperity and thus a constituent of dominating masculinities:

There was a wealthy man, in Okonkwo’s village, who had three barns, nine wives and thirty children. His name was Nwakibie and he had taken the highest but one title which a man could take in the clan. It was for this man that Okonkwo worked to earn his first seed yams. (P.20)

Throughout the text, Achebe gives description of his male characters in terms of their wealth and prosperity which shows the behavior of Igbo culture that they consider ‘man’ to a person who has wealth and good status in society.

Okonkwo’s prosperity was visible in his household. He had a large compound enclosed by a thick wall of red earth. Each of his three wives had her own hut. The barn was built against one end of the red walls, and long stacks of yam stood out prosperously in it. (P.15)

J. Success- No failure

Achebe also throws light on a very significant reality of masculine Igbo society where a man is worth calling a man only when he is successful and bears no failure in any respect. A man should be economically, socially and domestically successful in order to receive respect and honor in a patriarchal society. If a man is poor and unable to support his family, he is considered as failure and is treated like a woman. We see that Unoka, the grown up, was a failure. He was poor and his wife and children had barely enough to eat. People laughed at him because he was a loafer. (P.5)

On the other hand: Okoye was also a musician. But he was not a failure like Unoka. He had a large barn full of yams and he had three wives. And now he was going to take the Idemili title, the third highest in the land. (P.7)

As the unsuccessful men in Igbo society are treated like women, it was justified for manly character like Okonkwo that he fears failure and does not want to be like his father.

His whole life was dominant by fear, the fear of failure and of weakness. It was the fear of himself, lest he should be found to resemble his father. Even as a little boy he had resented his father’s failure and weakness, and 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 came for a woman, it could also mean a man who had taken no title. (P.15)
K. Wrestling / Fighting

In the Ibo village, the wrestling matches are events which can signal the passage from childhood into maturity for the boys, or continued virility and leadership for the men.

*Okonkwo was well known throughout the nine village and even beyond. His fame rested on solid personal achievements. As a young man of eighteen he had brought honor to his village by throwing Amalinze the cat. Amalinze was the great wrestler who for seven years was unbeaten, from Umoufia to Mbaino. (P.3)*

Not only the men but also the women of that society are fond of that masculine attribute. *There was no festival in all the seasons of the year which gave her as much pleasure as the wrestling match. Many years ago when she was the village beauty Okonkwo had won her heat by throwing the Cat in the greatest contest. (P.42)*

Whenever any man confirms this attribute, he is celebrated and honored in a heroic way. They sang his praise and the young women clapped their hands:

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“Who will wrestle for our village?
Okafo will wrestle for our village.
Has he thrown a hundred men?
He has thrown four hundred men.
Has he thrown a hundred Cats?
He has thrown four hundred Cats.
Then send him word to fight for us”.
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(P.53)

L. Social repute and respect

Social repute is extremely important to the men. Personal reputation is denoted by the ankle bracelets men wear, which signify the number of titles they have earned publicly. Generally, reputation is based on merit. Men gain reputation through bravery in battle, skills at wrestling, and hard work as seen through the size of their yam harvest. Reputation earns men positions of power and influence in the community as well as numerous wives. Okonkwo is extremely concerned with reputation because he grew up with a father who was shameful and lazy.

*Okonkwo was well known throughout the nine villages and even beyond. His fame rested on solid personal achievements. (p.3)*

Okonkwo gains respect for himself and his village by proving his mettle in a physical contest of wrestling.

*During this time Okonkwo’s fame had grown like a bush-fire in the harmattan. He had a slight stammer and whenever he was angry and could not get his words out quickly enough, he would use his fists. He had no patience with unsuccessful men. (p.4)*

Okonkwo equates reputation with physical prowess and courage. He is so proud of his own reputation that he cannot stand less successful men. Though he is a highly ranked man in his village, you can’t help but wonder if such an aggressive and prideful man merits the good reputation he has.
V. Conclusion and significance

While analyzing the stereotypical masculine attributes, the analyses clearly indicate that concepts of manliness and masculinities are not fixed naturally rather these are the construction of the minds of the people. Data indicates that a man is always brave, he has courage to face to world, and he has the potential of being on top; such notions are usually disseminated to assert bravery. Throughout the novel, the readers are reminded of Okonkwo’s bravery and thus confirmed that bravery is a social construct which has been attached only with men.

The findings show that aggressiveness is conventionally considered an important masculine trait in many cultures. Dawson (1994) also observes that ‘Military virtues such as aggression, strength, courage and endurance have repeatedly been defined as the natural and inherent qualities of manhood. And his eminence as an aggressive man is exactly one of the ways in which Achebe shows Okonkwo asserting his manhood in the novel. The analysis also suggests that according to the African constructs of masculinity, male must be emotionally strong. He must have good control over his feelings and emotions. He must not be the subject of his emotions. And this is what Achebe constructs in the personality of his male characters. He presents emotions as feminine trait.

It is found that warrior-ship is another masculine attribute through which masculinities are presented. It is due to the warrior-ship and courage of a ‘great’ man that he is respected not only in his own society, but also honored and respected in neighboring villages. Prosperity and wealth, as presented by Achebe, are source of attention and attraction for a man living in a male dominant society like Umoufia. If a man is not prosperous enough to support his wives and children, he is laughed at by the others. Data also indicates that a man’s prosperity is not limited to money only. Even there are some other elements and factors which constitute a man’s prosperity in Igbo society. The number of wives, children, barns and of titles is also considered sources of prosperity and thus a constituent of dominating masculinities.

The finding shows that in Nigerian cultures the wrestling matches are events which can signal the passage from childhood into maturity for the boys, or continued virility and leadership for the men. Man has always been taking advantage of his physical strength. He uses his strength to oppress women and tries to assert his masculinity in this way. Beating is a heinous curse inflicted upon women. It is so much in practice that it has assumed a part of cultural norms in the Igbo community.

In the end, it is concluded that the present study of Achebe’s work has academic, literary, critical, and socio-political implications. It may stimulate the students to study African writers particularly Achebe’s works in their research works as well as in academic field. Usually, literary works of the classical, romantic or modern English writers are considered worthy to be brought into the domain of the research studies. Little critical work has been done on African literature in English. It has little recognition in the mainstream of English literature. It remains left over, isolated and excluded from the mainstream literature in English.

As the present study is about a current issue in the literary and critical arena i.e. gender studies and one of the heated debates among the feminists and masculinists, it may help to elucidate Achebe’s works and masculine themes he has presented in his
works. Moreover, the theme of masculinities has been less emphasized in literary research. It may get more significance and it will also arouse the interest of the scholars entering the arena of research. It may assist to bring the issues faced by women of the postcolonial regions in the mainstream struggle for women rights and dominance. It will clarify the fact that their issues are not cultural but patriarchal in nature and also masculinities are not a fixed phenomenon rather it is a social construct. If it happens, it may further lead to their emancipation from the cruel clutches of the biased local patriarchy.

References


