Masculinity and cultural conflict in Chinua Achebe’s Things Fall Apart

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The African people have varying behaviours, mannerisms, beliefs, thought patterns and way of interaction and all of these differences formed their culture and impacted their way of life. However, with the coming of the Europeans to Africa came cultural infiltration, pollution as well as alteration. This research analyses Chinua Achebe’s Things Fall Apart (1958) from the angle of masculinity and culture clash (traditional vs. western) as brought about by westernisation. The method of investigation is analytical and descriptive, using the formalist approach: that is looking at the actions, events, sentences and interactions of the characters in order to identify and discuss how males are portrayed, paying attention to issues of cultural realism, behaviours, actions and statements of the characters. The findings of the research confirmed that African viewpoint of masculinity and culture tends to be opposed to that of the Europeans, as the actions and behaviours appropriate to a man in each society tend to differ. This led to different clashes from religious, cultural, ideological, to social beliefs. The research reached the conclusion that cultural clashes exist in the work and contributed to the final play-out of the story, where the traditional belief system had to make way for western ones; making things (cultural beliefs) fall apart. The research reveals that the male characters have both cultural and individual masculine idiosyncrasies and that the complexities of male roles confirm the pluralistic and slippery nature of masculinity.

Key words: Masculinity, gender discourse, hegemony, sexuality, Nigerian novel

INTRODUCTION

The theme of clash of culture in Achebe’s Things Fall Apart (1958) is not new as several scholars have written severally on the topic, what is however new is the treatment of Masculinity and how it affects or contributes to Culture clash in the text. The research reviews the discourse of masculinity and culture clash by gendering the two societies in focus – western culture and African Traditional culture to ascertain which is masculine and which is feminine. It looks at the traits and qualities of these two societies and compares these traits from the lens of traditional gender roles.

The study x-rays culture and masculinity as a cultural and social reality visible and permissible in Igbo land of Nigeria before and during the colonial era of the Europeans as reflected in Chinua Achebe’s novel Things Fall Apart (1958). The study of the novel, some critics believe, is the study of the society from which it emerges (Gikandi, 1987). The relationship between literature and
society is a symbiotic one, and that was why Plato, several decades ago in his work, *The Republic* (about 370 B.C.) noted that literature is an aspect of knowledge, potent enough to influence the society. Though the subject of literature is infinite, the literary artists often represent situations that reflect our world and this is why even where "themes of literature" are derived from myth, culture, history or from contemporary situations, or even from pure inventions, such works remain ‘constructed from the constant materials of real experience’ (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1046).

In the African literary scene, Chinua Achebe is one of the most vociferous writers in Africa on the role that literature plays in the society. He (along with other African writers like Wole Soyinka, Ngugiwa Thiong'o, AyiKwei Armah, T. M. Aluko, Flora Nwapo, Buchi Emecheta, Festus Iyayi, Ben Okri, Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo, to mention just a few) has used the literary medium to express his intense desire for a true reflection, a reform, a reawakening of society to the full awareness of its lost values, which the African social life was based upon, before the arrival of colonialism and Western ideologies. Art, therefore, for Achebe and other writers, is not something far removed from experience; rather, it is a replication of life achieved through the creative power of the artist (a writer in this instance). He articulates this view when he says that:

Art is man’s constant effort to create for himself a different order of reality from that which is given to him; an inspiration to provide himself with a second handle on existence through imagination (96) (Achebe, 1964)i.

Several other writers and critics (Soyinka, Clark, Akpororo Baro, Oladele, Ezeigbo, Bamidele, Oloko amongst several others), have noted the interrelationship between not only the novel and society, but by extension the writer, the critic and the characters created in literary works. Each conceptualises the reality of the literary product within the environment from which it evolves, and the inevitability of aspects of the society being reflected in it.

Achebe’s textual practice aims to transform and reinvent the African world, the novelty of his narrative language derives from what Pierre Machereyii would call its “self-constituting” power. Gikandi (1991) states that Achebe’s works and thoughts always return to the forgotten questions of the African experience: where, why and when does colonialism begin to seize the initiative in the organisation of African society (*Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*)? How can an African nation and community be created in the marginal space between autonomy and the colonizing structure (*No Longer at Ease*)? What situation and how can the pitfall of national consciousness in Africa be represented without giving to despair (*A Man of the People* and *Anthills of the Savannah*) (1991: 10).

The style of Achebe’s fiction draws heavily on the oral tradition of the Igbo people, as he weaves folktales into the fabric of his stories, revealing community values in both the content and the form of the storytelling. The tale about the Earth and Sky in *Things Fall Apart*, for example, emphasises the interdependency of the masculine and the feminine, as the earth needs raindrops and sunshine from the sky to flourish. This is a cultural belief but it is also a reality of life. Several things need to be in accordance for the world to be enjoyable by all; each gender has a definite role to play for the unity and advancement of the society in which they belong and every society has its own traditional gender roles.

If viewed on the surface, the story line of *Things Fall Apart* is a tragedy, but when viewed in a wider perspective, it is a story of deeper conflict as the underlying issue is culture clash between traditional and western, masculinity and femininity, and this is the whole essence of this research.

**Okonkwo’s ways: Personal or cultural?**

The beliefs of Okonkwo on the handling and treatment of issues termed feminine are not a cultural belief, but personal as other successful and prosperous men are observed not to share in his handling of some societal issues. The beating of women, the involvement in the killing of Ikemefuna, the agitation to wage war against the white missionary in both Umuofia and Mbanta were some of the issues where Okonkwo did not have full support from other men in the society, and his reason for terming them ‘effeminate’.

...he mourned for the warlike men of Umuofia, who had so unaccountably become soft like women. (p. 129) If Umuofia decided on war, all would be well. But they chose to be cowards he would go out and avenge himself…. (p. 141)

‘Worthy men are no more,’... those were days when men were men. (p. 141) ‘The greatest obstacle in Umuofia’ Okonkwo thought bitterly, ’is that coward, Egonwanne. His sweet tongue can change fire into cold ash. When he speaks, he moves our men to impotence. If they had ignored his womanish wisdom five years ago, we would not have come to this’…. If they listen to him I shall leave them and plan my own revenge. (p. 141)

Okonkwo is of the opinion that traditional men have lost their place in society and cannot be termed ‘worthy’ anymore as Western culture has softened their resolve; men have been turned to weaklings by colonisation and the white man’s religion. Umofia, a man who seemed to have been assimilated into beliefs of the colonisers becomes Okonkwo’s greatest obstacle as ‘when he
speaks, he moves our men to impotence’. An adage says that ‘a man cannot go to war against a clan and win’, Okonkwo is however seen taking the supposed societal abuse into his own hand by avenging himself as against the wish and desire of the clan. He kills the messenger of the Whiteman who tries to stop the clans’ meeting; but as the other messengers escape, he knew Umuofia would not go to war.

Okonkwo stood looking at the dead man. He knew Umuofia would not go to war. He knew because they had let other messengers escape. They had broken into tumult instead of action. He discerned fright in that tumult. (pp. 144-145)

As a result of this action, he realises he is on his own and will not get any protection from the society, thus commits the abominable act of hanging himself. This act of hanging is itself cowardice and contravenes the belief of the same society he claims to be protecting. Only a weakling (effeminate male) commits suicide in Igbo traditional context. Thus here, can it be said that Okonkwo is a weakling when it comes to anger and temper management? Or that it is the psychological trauma/torture that he cannot withstand? Every gender, male or female has a positive and a negative attribute, thus these weak attributes of Okonkwo can be termed, from a normative point of view, the negative masculine attributes.

Furthermore, a detrimental flaw is his unwilling attitude to accept the changes taking place in the traditional society in which he grew up and was used to. He is not able to adapt to the clashing values of both his society and the western society, and the revolving nature of the society in which he lives. He could not accept the fact that in a colonized society, he would be an average male, as against a distinguished and powerful hyper-male that he is in the traditional society. Okonkwo builds his life on the principles of masculinity and a slight showing of weakness would spark a fiery anger. The symbol ‘fire’ is used throughout the novel to epitomize Okonkwo’s nature; he is fierce and destructive just like the god ‘Sango’ in Yoruba mythology.

Okonkwo was popularly called the ‘Roaring Flame’. As he looked into the log fire he recalled the name. He was a flaming fire (p. 123).

After being released from prison, Okonkwo is furious and only looked to seek revenge. His only solution was a violent one: to go to war, consume anything on his way like the fire that he is. Thus, when the messengers tried to stop the meeting, Okonkwo ends up killing the lead messenger. This moment in the novel portrays his character flaws of masculinity and rashness combined with violence and anger, uncontrollable fire. He had only one thing on his mind at the time: to be a man, take control, and in his mind this would be achieved by simply killing the messenger. Okonkwo realises the tribe did not want to go to war. At this very moment he believes they had all become weak (like women) and failed his expectations of what he considers masculine. He is later found dangling from a tree having hanged himself. He could no longer live in a society where masculinity, the very thing that drove him throughout his entire life, was no longer a part of the society, his society.

**Clash of cultures: African versus Western**

Clearly, the Ibo would prefer to speak in reference to common traditional values and respect. The conflict here is the direct nature with which the western culture speaks, avoiding any reference to an anecdote relevant to the situation, thus separating the two cultures for lack of any common background. This conflict is referenced in chapter twenty as Okonkwo speaks with a friend about the division between them:

Does the white man understand our customs about land? How can he when he does not even speak our tongue? (p. 176).

Language is the very first link between people as it is their identity. People easily connect with someone who understands and speak their language while the inability to understand the other individual’s language forms a barrier that will need to be broken. If you do not understand the language of a people, the tendency is high that you will not understand their culture and share their beliefs. This lack of common language results in a division in understanding that would impinge on legal, religious and cultural appreciation. With the arrival of the Europeans came new laws and religion, thus a cultural conflict. Consequently, when referring to Okonkwo’s act of beating up his wife, one notices the existence of a disparity (Achebe, 1984).

For the British colonialists, that Okonkwo beats his wife (which is an African masculine attribute) will form the bone of contention and not that he beats her during “Peace Week” (a week of traditional cultural purification). However, for the traditional society, wife beating is a masculine trait and forms no major offence but beating her during peace week is the real offense. Thus, Okonkwo is punished and made to atone for the sin of beating his wife because it was carried out during the peace week.

A cultural division such as this separates the two cultures and leads to an ethnocentric approach to dealing with each other. What might appear to be the correct solution by one group (masculine or feminine) is harsh and unacceptable by another. Although the tribal law which is masculine is natureis termed harsh, the European effeminate law is not in any way better. This is
expected to happen as the belief system of both cultures (gender) does not agree on several things in the first instance. The religious views of both groups are totally contradictory: while in the African (masculine) context one has to make sacrifices of animals (sometimes humans) as the circumstances requires, in the European (feminine) context one does not need to shed any blood especially as Jesus Christ already shed his blood on the Cross of Calvary. This one time shedding of blood is not the belief of the Igbo. In marriage, an Igbo man may marry as many wives as he desires, a masculine trait, while in the European context, polygamy is frowned at. What will constitute an offence in some parts is embraced by others.

Neither the Western nor the African society in the novel is idealized, as both cultures have their individual faults; however, it is these faults, which create the biggest problems. One such source of trouble is sacrifices", which was not out of the question for the Igbo if it meant clan cleansing and survival through the appeasement of the gods. Such was the case for a young boy (Ikemefuna) whose society released to Umuofia, their neighbours, through a peace agreement between the two tribes. This young boy was in essence a ward of the tribe, even though Okonkwo was responsible for his upbringing. As mentioned earlier, Ikemefuna is eventually sacrificed by the clan to appease the gods of the land. Although it was deeply upsetting to Okonkwo, he knew it would serve to benefit his people. The missionary had looked down on this type of religious sacrifice due to their belief in God, who would never ask for the killing of another man to placate Himself, or at least this is what they preached. This action of killing Ikemefuna to appease the god of the land taken by the Africans, which is a traditional rite, would have caused greater controversy between the two groups had it happened when the missionaries had arrived, as their laws and religion are against the idea of sacrificing humans for the supposed appeasement of a god.

However, stories of similar episodes had been told to the Pastors when they did arrive and was a reason the missionaries were determined to make "good Christians" out of the native "barbaric" Africans. This culture clash, if looked at from the point of view of masculinity versus femininity places the African society in the robes of masculinity which should be unemotional, strong, assertive, insensitive authority etc., while Christianity, a religion that is considerate, sensitive, cooperative and emotional, can be said, again in normative terms, to be feminine as socially constructed by society. The eventual domination of Westernisation and Christianity over Traditional culture and religion however needs deep thought.

Drawing on comparisons between the white infiltration and Okonkwo's struggle to be as different from his deceased father as possible, a vague parallel exists. Okonkwo states clearly that he wants to distance himself as much as possible from his father, who can be said to have hypo-masculine (effeminate) traits. He believes his father is weak and lacking any quality of a strong warrior or contributor to the clan, therefore is effeminate. Okonkwo endeavours to be a strong warrior and a powerful elder with many titles, portraying the features of a hyper-masculine/hegemonic character. It is then understandable that Umuofia, and in particular Okonkwo, would despise the whites for making their young men lazy and reliant on the Europeans and their Western beliefs as against African beliefs. When Okonkwo's own son joins the church, he feels a great sadness that his son, who is already weak in mind, would become more softened by the white feminine culture. Feminine versus masculine traits is the controversy in this instance. Okonkwo has built his whole life on the masculinity of the tribe, the masculinity that had helped the tribe survive before the arrival of the Western culture and ideologies.

**Challenging senior African masculinity**

The plot in *Things Fall Apart* suggests that colonial conquest helped undermined the authority and power base of senior men in the African/Nigerian community as colonial officers (even messengers), labour recruiters and young men challenge titled chiefs and fathers, attacking the dominant idea of masculinity. The things that ordinarily would probably not happen in the African cultural society begin to happen with the arrival of the Whiteman. People begin to disregard elders who are not Christians, spiritual norms were being broken (the killing of the sacred python) and younger male began to resist elders by contradicting their dictates, therefore challenging senior African masculinity.

**Okonkwo versus Nwoye**

The first evident challenge of senior African masculinity is the case between Okonkwo and Nwoye. Nwoye is Okonkwo's eldest son and the traditional heir to the family kingdom. Okonkwo however sees signs of weakness in his first son and this gives him worries even before the arrival of western ideologies. Okonkwo wanted his son to be a great farmer and a great man. He would stamp out the disquieting signs of laziness which he thought he already saw in him.

'I will not have a son who cannot hold up his head in the gathering of the clan. I would sooner strangle him with my own hands' (pp. 23-24).

He thus does all he can to ensure the boy does not end up like the effeminate Unoka, his father. He encourages his sons to think like traditional African men (as Africa has traditional gender roles for men) by encouraging him
and his other male children to sit with him in his obi while
he narrates stories of the land - masculine stories of
violence and bloodshed (p. 37) rather than be with their
mothers in the kitchen (as that is a role for women/girls)
or listening to stories he terms feminine as told by his
wives. He confirms he will not hesitate to eliminate any
male child who appears lazy than allow such bring shame
to him and his household. We notice that his efforts yield
results as Nwoye subsequently tries to do only the things
that pleases his father:

Nothing pleased Nwoye now more than to be sent for by
his mother or another of his father's wives to do one of
those difficult and masculine tasks in the home, like
splitting wood or pounding food. On receiving such a
message through a younger brother or sister, Nwoye
would feign annoyance and grumble aloud about women
and their troubles (emphasis mine) (p. 37).

This 'acting' was simply to gratify Okonkwo, who was always happy when he hears Nwoye complaining or grumbling about women, as that convinced him that in time he would be able to control his women-folk (p. 37). This 'acting' and the trainings by Okonkwo had impact on Nwoye as he became convinced that he must be masculine even though he still enjoys his mother's feminine stories better than Okonkwo's.

Nwoye knew that it was right to be masculine and to be violent, but somehow he still preferred the stories that his mother used to tell... (p. 37)

A deeper study of Nwoye reveals that he still has those effeminate tendencies and is only trying to humour his father by acting tough:

And so he feigned (emphasis is mine) that he no longer cared for women's stories. And when he did this he saw that his father was pleased, and no longer rebuked him or beat him (p. 38).

With the arrival of Europeans however, Nwoye does a full
turn around and does exactly, that which upsets his
father – joining the new religion (Christianity) and disregarding his father's orders, not minding being disowned; this is an obvious culture clash between traditional and Western beliefs, and also representative of masculine versus feminine (or is it hypo-masculine?) beliefs. Nwoye decides to follow his own feminine heart for once and do only things, which pleases him: he decides to join the church and this leads to the unleashing of Okonkwo's wrath on Nwoye:

...he saw Nwoye among Christians... It was late in the
afternoon before Nwoye returned. He went into the obi IV
and saluted his father, but he did not answer. Nwoye
turned round to walk into the inner compound when his
father, suddenly overcome with fury, sprang to his feet
and gripped him by the neck. 'Where have you been? He
stammered...answer me! Roared Okonkwo, 'before I kill
you! He seized a heavy stick ...and hit him two or three
savage blows (p. 107).

Okonkwo expresses his masculine trait of anger,
assertiveness and violence for he feels humiliated that
his son, his first son (traditional heir) joins the
missionaries (Western) and it is this humiliation, this pride
that makes him attack Nwoye, and eventually disowns
him (cultural clash). Despite the attack on Nwoye by
Okonkwo, he does not raise his hand in defence
(something Okonkwo would have done if he was in
Nwoye's shoes) as tradition believes a man must defend
himself, rather he quietly walks away, never to return,
something a woman would have done. This action marks
the beginning of Nwoye's freedom from the apron of his
father, and his coming of age as a man. Here, he decides
to reap the fruit of his action and become a man by
deciding to go to Umofia and enrol in school to read and
write. This act of rebellion marks a cultural clash between
traditional and Western masculinities.

In a traditional setting, families usually stick together irrespective of the issues or circumstances they may have (in this case cultivating the land or hunting) but here, one sees a son going against the dictates of the father because of foreign ideologies and way of life. In Africa as of the time, it was a waste of time for boys to go to school as they will rather be on the farm or be doing more 'serious' things. Okonkwo sees this as an act of cowardice and something abominable in the site of the gods of the land:

"to abandon the gods of one's father and go about with a
lot of effeminate men clucking like old hens was the very
depth of abomination" (p. 108).

His fear is however greater than just losing Nwoye, but of losing his entire household to the new religion:

Suppose when he died all his male children decided to
follow Nwoye's step and abandon their ancestors? Okonkwo felt a cold shudder run through him at the
terrible prospect, like the prospect of annihilation...if such
a thing were ever to happen, he, Okonkwo, would wipe
them off the face of the earth...How could he have
begotten a woman for a son? (108).

To ensure this fear does not come to reality, Okonkwo
summons all his other sons: He had five other sons and
he would bring them up in the way of the clan. He sent for
the five sons and they came and sat in his obi. The
youngest of them was four years old.

'You have all seen the great abomination of your brother.
Now he is no longer my son or your brother. I will only
have a son who is a man, who will hold his head up among my people. If any one of you prefers to be a woman, let him follow Nwoye now while I am alive so that I can curse him... If you turn against me when I am dead I will visit you and break your neck' (pp. 121-122).

Okonkwo uses all the wit at his disposal to ensure no other son of his abandons the traditional religion (masculinity) to join the western religion (femininity). However, it becomes obvious that the ideology of masculinity of Okonkwo is that of a dying age as even traditional senior men in society began to key into the new way of life.

The elders versus messengers

In African culture, younger persons are groomed to respect elders, be they direct parents or not, and this was the norm in Umofia and all of Igbo land before the arrival of the Whiteman, his religion and his education. With the coming of westernization, many cultural beliefs of the clan were being openly antagonised, defied and eroded. Some of these norms, which new converts defied, include the killing of the sacred python and the unmasking of the egwugwu.

One of the greatest crimes a man could commit was to unmask an egwugwu in public, or to say anything, which might reduce its immortal prestige in the eyes of the uninitiated. And this was what Enoch did (p. 131).

The act of unmasking the spirit led to the meeting with Mr Smith and the eventual burning of the church – African culture versus Western culture. It was the burning of the church that informed the District Commissioner’s invitation of the six elders to his office for questioning. Despite their preparedness and precaution, they suffer in the hands of the district commissioner and his messengers as they were detained and grossly humiliated.

And so the six men went to see the District Commissioner, armed with their machetes...I have asked you to come, began the Commissioner...Ogbuefi Ekwueme rose to his feet and began to tell the story...of how Enoch murdered an egwugwu. It happened so quickly...the six men were handcuffed and led into the guardroom...The six men remained sullen and silent and the Commissioner left them for a while. He told the court messenger...no one had seen the approach of the five court messengers until they had come round the bend... Okonkwo... sprang to his feet... confronted the head messenger, trembling with hate, unable to utter a word. The man was fearless and stood his ground, his four men lined up behind him... the spell was broken by the head messenger. ‘Let me pass!’ he ordered...’The white man whose power you know too well has ordered this meeting to stop (emphasis is mine).’(p. 144)

This public confrontation between Okonkwo, the elders and the messengers (elders versus junior men) is a ridicule of the traditional belief as the messenger says the Whiteman is superior and therefore has ordered the stoppage of a meeting of titled elders of the clan. Although social, economic, and legal changes brought by colonial rule gave social juniors and women opportunities for autonomy from these senior men, African male elders however found it in their own interests to support the state on certain issues, as their power rested on its relationship, even as their authority was undermined by the new opportunities that the colonial structures and agents provided to junior men and women. This new stand, which clashes with the Igbo culture, is what Okonkwo is not willing to take, thus his terming of other clansmen as effeminate when they refused to challenge the messengers as they allow the others to escape when

by untitled men/ messengers of the Whiteman, who were told earlier to treat the elders with caution:

As soon as the District Commissioner left, the head messenger, who was also the prisoners’ barber, took down his razor and shaved off all the hair on the men’s heads...Who is the Chief among you? The court messenger asked in jest. We see that every pauper wears the anklet of title in Umofia. Does it cost as much as ten cowries? (p. 138).

Who wants to kill the white man? Asked a messenger who has just rushed in. Nobody spoke. ‘You are not satisfied with your crime, but you must kill the white man on top of it.’ He carried a strong stick, and he hit each man a few blows on the head and back. Okonkwo was choked with hate (p. 138).

These messengers are full groomed Africans who were taught the ways of the Europeans and their beliefs. We see again the old ideology of the clan being challenged by junior men, men who ordinarily will not dare challenge titled men and leaders of the land, they not only challenge these titled men but also dehumanise them and treat them like common criminals by shaving off their hair and hitting them with sticks on the head. Tensions between different generations of men were only enhanced by circumstances produced by westernization and colonialism. Here, younger men challenged fathers, titled men of the clan, and attacked their dominant cultural ideas:

...no one had seen the approach of the five court messengers until they had come round the bend... Okonkwo... sprang to his feet... confronted the head messenger, trembling with hate, unable to utter a word. The man was fearless and stood his ground, his four men lined up behind him... the spell was broken by the head messenger. ‘Let me pass!’ he ordered...’The white man whose power you know too well has ordered this meeting to stop (emphasis is mine).’(p. 144)

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he killed their leader.

Okonkwo was deeply grieved. And it was not just a personal grief. He mourned for the clan, which he saw breaking up and falling apart and he mourned for the warlike men of Umoﬁa, who had so unaccountedly become soft like women. (p. 129). Okonkwo, who is not willing to change with the times and his fellow senior men, decides to commit an abominable act of hanging himself on a tree, an act the culture he so much ﬁghts for, condemns. This act marks the victory of western ideology over the African belief system. Even at the demise of a great senior man of the clan, the messengers continue to challenge their authority and position even as the colonial master looks on without stopping the messengers:

Obierika, who had been gazing steadily at his friend’s dangling body, turned suddenly to the District Commissioner and said ferociously:’ that man was one of the greatest men in Umoﬁa. You drove him to kill himself; and now he will be buried like a dog...’ Shut up!’ shouted one of the messengers, quite unnecessarily. (p. 147)

At this point, one begins to wonder who is masculine and who is effeminate between these two groups of men – the senior African men or the junior men. Things have indeed fallen apart among the men of the clan and the centre is not holding, but only a certain man who refuses to change because of his belief that he must always be seen as masculine, suffers the consequences:

‘A proud heart can survive a general failure because such a failure does not prick its pride. It is more difficult and more bitter when a man fails alone’ (18).

This is a pointer that when a society fails, the proud has a hiding place; however, nobody can be blamed for personal failures except that individual himself.

Conclusion

From the review of this novel, it is obvious that the main character in the text, Okonkwo represent the Traditional masculine culture while the white colonizers represent the Western effeminate culture. There were several gendered clashes in the cultures of the two societies, which are majorly social – language, religion and total way of life. Things fall apart as both societies cannot agree on views about the cultural, social and gender views of their people. The conﬂict really is not between male and female, masculinity and femininity, rather it is about cultural ideas and beliefs about masculinity. Okonkwo, a traditional masculine man, not ﬁtting into the new effeminate way of life, commits suicide; the traditional society continues to lose its young men and women to the new religion, young men attend schools rather than go to the farm, traditional sacriﬁces become outlawed while younger men begin to disrespect their elders. The systems clash and everything seems to fail. The Western colonizers are to blame for the collapse of the African system as they came uninvited and then dominated the people and their beliefs. The colonial conquest helped undermine the authority and power base of senior men as young men challenge titled chiefs and fathers, attacking the dominant idea of masculinity.

The battle between masculinity and femininity are socially constructed ideas which tend to vary from people to people, place to place and even individual to individual. African viewpoint of masculinity and culture tends to be opposed to that of the Europeans, as the actions and behaviours appropriate to a man in each society tend to differ. This led to different clashes from religious, cultural, ideological, to social beliefs. The research concludes that masculine cultural clashes exist in the work and contributed to the ﬁnal play-out of the story, where the traditional masculine belief system had to make way for the western effeminate ones; making things (cultural beliefs) fall apart. The research reveals that the male characters have both cultural and individual masculine idiosyncrasies as African male characters in the text – Okonkwo, Nwoye, messengers, Obierika, other titled men etc – tend to differ and react differently to the new western ideologies.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors have not declared any conﬂict of interest.

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End notes

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2 Pierre Macherey (born 17 February 1938, Belfort) is a French Marxist literary critic at Université Lille Nord de France. A former student of Louis Althusser and collaborator on the inﬂuential volume Reading “Capital”. Macherey is a central ﬁgure in the development of French post-structuralism and Marxism.
3 This is the process of atonement of the gods for offences committed.
4 The large living quarters of the head of the family in the African culture, usually the largest in the entire compound.
5 A masquerade, which represents one of the ancestral spirit of the village. It is the spiritual representation of the people on earth.
6 One of the overzealous converts in Umoﬁa. He was the son of the snake-priest who was also believed to have killed and eaten the sacred python. He touched off the greatest conﬂicts between the clan and the church and was responsible for the unmasking of an egwugwu.