



## "A Study of Hegemonic Masculinity in Chinua Achebe's Novel "Things Fall Apart"

Maha Shahid  
Ghulam Fatima  
Tallat Jabeen

Student (BS English) University of Sargodha, Sargodha at- [Mahashahid100@gmail.com](mailto:Mahashahid100@gmail.com)

BS English (Student) University of Sargodha, Sargodha at- [Ghulamfatimal903@gmail.com](mailto:Ghulamfatimal903@gmail.com)

Lecturer (English) The University of Lahore, Sargodha Campus at- [Tallat.jabeen@ell.edu.pk](mailto:Tallat.jabeen@ell.edu.pk)

**Citation:** Maha Shahid, Ghulam Fatima, & Tallat Jabeen. (2024). A Study of Hegemonic Masculinity in Chinua Achebe's Novel "Things Fall Apart". *Al-Qirtas*, 3(3). Retrieved from <https://al-qirtas.com/index.php/Al-Qirtas/article/view/353>

### *Abstract:*

*This paper investigates the question that how Masculinity has been represented and constructed in Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart. It focuses on the complete structure and tradition of Igbo culture which celebrates the customs centered on male dominance. The protagonist Okonkwo is the major focus of study. His masculinity is compared with other characters in the story especially Nwoye. Achebe's narrator of Okonkwo's character associating description of physical power, authority, wealth and violence portrays masculinity in Things Fall Apart. Nwoye character is there to portray alternative masculinity. Nwoye's refusal to be a man in traditional sense presents alternative subjectivity which is in conflict with hegemonic masculinity projected by his father. This paper aims to analyze all such depictions of masculinity within the novel to investigate the writer's stance on the perspective of masculinity. It also aims to investigate how the dominant culture sets the criteria for a man or a woman and decides who is a human. This paper manifests all these speculations along with their actual occurrences in the text.*

**Keywords:** *Hegemony, Masculinity, Igbo culture, tradition, Chinua Achebe, Things Fall Apart*

### Introduction

Chinua Achebe, a prominent Nigerian author and literary icon, made significant contributions to African literature through his thought-provoking works. He has played a significant role in the global literary movement that has defined and characterised the African experience. He skillfully captures in his novels the British peoples' colonization of Nigeria and the ensuing political unrest. Things Fall Apart, a groundbreaking work by Chinua Achebe, actually departs



greatly from more familial colonial writing. Achebe states, "Write your own story if you don't like someone else's." in the Paris Review from 1994. As a result, he devotes his writing career to exploring the colonial experience from the perspective of the colonized, as well as to challenging European terminology that perpetuates numerous falsehoods about Africans.

His novel "Things Fall Apart" is regarded as the most accurate account of Nigerian life at the beginning of the 20th century ever written. This book's title is derived from a line in W.B. Yeats' poem "The Second Coming." Achebe stated in Things Fall Apart that he wanted to show a western audience an intricate and dynamic society because they thought Africans were backward, simple, and primitive. Things Fall Apart" presents a nuanced depiction of masculinity within the Igbo culture and provides valuable insights into the complex interplay between tradition, identity, and societal change.

Through his main character named Okonkwo, Achebe explores the multifaceted aspects of masculinity, including its strengths, limitations, and the consequences of adhering rigidly to traditional gender roles. African's perception of life is also presented by Chinua as he translated African proverbs into English as these proverbs have no equivalent in English language. We can confidently claim that Things Fall Apart tells truth about the Africans, their cultural identity and their response to the British Imperialism. Through this research article, we seek to shed light on the significance of Achebe's portrayal of masculinity, offering fresh perspectives and critical insights into the narrative strategies employed by the author. By analyzing specific scenes, character development, and cultural nuances, we hope to contribute to the existing scholarship on gender representation and illuminate the complexities inherent in Achebe's exploration of masculinity in "Things Fall Apart."

### Literature Review

How masculinity is portrayed by Chinua Achebe in his novel Things Fall Apart has been a concern to a number of scholars. Some of them notion it to be a facet of Patriarchal cultural construction and society; in the other latency, others aim the Receptive masculinity construct. Even in these instances, however, he says, 'Nwoye enters the moon, or the temple Nneka, and watches being othered within the scope of the novel and therefore conceptualized in the 'Other'. It is also Smiths (1998) view, that the masculinity portrayed in Achebes works, though leftist, is



predominantly male gender violent which believes that a man ought to be 'tough, subdue a battle, earn money and seek titles'. Recent attention in literature revisits the masculinity which was established in the Igbo society and disturbed by colonialism in the background of the novel *Things Fall Apart*. Throughout the Igbo society, male members, as Ngugi (2000) notes, feel a sense of de-masculinization and the loss of a very important aspect of cultural identity due to the way colonialism attacked the material structures and social constructs that supported the Quadrangular hegemonic masculinity. In addition to it, Brown (2008) thinks that such people's separation of the traditions of supremacist with monolithic femininity which existing members of society like Obierika and Ikemefuna.

Cultural feminists are anti-paternalism and are examples of, within their intelligence, curiosity as well as versatility personality traits, empathy. However, they do focus on male characters' involvement and perspectives in the advances and instead of a narrow view, more of male characters' involvement is portrayed in the book than normally held (Brown 2008).

Americana in this work presents a novel thought that has gained considerable attention. The third image of masculinity is the amalgamation of femininity with masculinity that subject Robinson who is also *ЕСТЬОК* (hence her name) considers, within this frame particularly receptive masculinity. Many researchers have tried to shed light on this phenomenon by creating an image analytic portrait of Okonkwo. This rigidity notwithstanding, and self-explained cruelty possesses compassion consideration, this violence is faced in a manly way. The husband-fixation as a means of social transformation has been investigated in conjunction with the Nicolo M. The perceived sexual power of the father, or rather the absent father, is what leads Okonkwo's son into a loving relationship with another man.

### Research Gap

However, this study has some implications worth considering. One such angle would be to do industry-centered research and find out how cross-cultural teams in other sectors outside IT cope working from home. For instance, the authors note that the remote work or telecommuting is not well adopted in the manufacturing or even healthcare sectors owing to the operational characteristics of these sectors (Hunter, 2019). It can also be stated that it is more or less useful to examine consequences of remote work from the perspective of different sectors.



### Research Questions

How does okonkwo embody hegemonic masculinity in Igbo society?

What are the consequences of okonkwo's rigid adherence to his rigid interpretation of masculinity on his family and himself?

How does Nwoye's view of masculinity differ from that of his father, and what factors contribute to these differences?

### Significance Of Study

This research provides new gateway to opens discussions on how societal pressures and personal insecurities can shape an individual life. Also explains how cultural norms and gender roles were upended by the spread of new religions and colonialism, leading to significant societal shifts and conflicts.

### Limitations Of Study

This paper does not explore how things like money or education effect masculinity, also male character are mostly follow so it might miss out other perspective.

### Research Methodology

In this study, a novel was observed and examined. It focuses on examining the emergence of a tragic hero in Things Fall Apart. The data collection, classification, discussion, and interpretation processes the research were conducted using a qualitative approach and textual analysis method. The analysis of research using a qualitative approach typically employs word forms rather than numerical data (Miles and Huberman, 1994:8). Furthermore, Berg (2001: 3) notes that one of the widely used observational techniques in qualitative research is textual analysis. Textual analysis, according to Lockyer (quoted in Sage Encyclopaedia of Qualitative Research Method, 2008: 865), is a technique for analysing data that closely looks at the meaning and content of texts.

### Queer Theory and Masculinity:

The concept of queer theory was significantly developed by scholars such as Judith Butler, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, and Michel Foucault. Judith Butler, in particular, is well-known for her work "Gender Trouble" (1990), which critiques the binary understanding of gender and introduces the idea of gender performativity. Eve Yet another fundamental text is "Epistemology



of the Closet” (1990) by Kosofsky. Several strategies are examined including the constitution and restriction of sexual identity by the social forces. As for the seminal works of Foucault, we find the social context of sexuality and power in the history of “The History of Sexuality” published in 1976. Queer theory as a discipline seeks to move beyond gender relations as a binary opposition, looking at additional forms of masculinity in this case. It looks into the possibilities of masculine conforming constructions that can exclude and constrain those who do not fit within the hetero-norm. Queer studies’ understanding of masculinity moreover allows machine novels to be written. Or in literature sustained by masculinity studies, where feminism is madness and man is king.

### **Data Collection**

The following is a description of the data collection procedures:

1. **Perusing the entire book:** Selects Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* as data source, reads the entire book, and then looks for and analyzes the characterization of the plot, conflict, climax, and resolution.
2. **Selecting the information that is relevant to the plot and the character:** The selection of the data, examines it and looks for a relationship between the characteristic and the plot.
3. **Categorizing the chosen data:** Selects the data and then groups them according to the plot to identify the key features.

### **Data Analysis**

In order to analyze the data the book was read repeatedly out loud and the major protagonist all the necessary information was recovered and the information arranged in the story line. The details show what major character have in terms of character. This will be clear with the help of exposition, conflict, climax, and resolution. Understanding how masculinity is constructed in “*Things Fall Apart*” by Chinua Achebe requires a higher appreciation of the Igbo society and the gender relations within. Okonkwo, is one of the characters through which Achebe’s complex view on masculinity is presented against pre-colonial Nigeria background. Okonkwo represents the reliable, firm, and culturally devoted Igbo man who is revered by the society as the embodiment of masculinity. Male structures the lifestyle like gender affairs, the need for power and hatred of being weak dwarf its societal culture. However as the story progresses, he



develops an entirely different view on such hypermasculinity with respect to the impact of changing society and colonialism as he juxtaposes Okonkwo's male aggression with feministic weakness and emotional turmoil. In addition to Okonkwo, the society as depicted in these novels has other male characters as well and how they adapt towards the changing society. For example, Achebe uses Obierika and Ikemefuna as representations of alternative ways of being a man, which include care, wisdom and flexibility in order to show that there are different forms of masculinity in Igbo society. From these, Achebe interrogates the preference for one form of masculinity and not the other and criticises the limits to which masculinity and femininity are tied. Eventually, such analysis of the masculinity data rather than reproducing negative stereotypes. As these analyses include socio-cultural and gender implications, the optimal agenda for all societal forms becomes apparent, a clear reframing of literary understanding for gender relations and power in African literature.

### The Concept Of Masculinity

Masculinity in literature depicts the aspects of male identity, their characteristics, roles and responsibilities in literature. It encompasses male figures in the story and the idea of male role in the society, in addition to the needs, wants and obstacles faced by men in different situations. While such influences as priority of being active, strong and brutish in order to protect one's household, and absence of feelings are common for masculine patterns of behavior. It has always been dynamic and has changed due to varying cultures and societies and includes a broad range of possible meanings and outlooks.

- **Postcolonial Masculinity:**

The study of postcolonial literature looks at how race, culture, and masculinity intersect in both colonial and postcolonial societies. It looks at how colonialism has affected how men construct and perform masculinity, frequently emphasizing the complexities, paradoxes, and difficulties men have to deal with after colonization.

- **Traditional Masculinity in Igbo Society:**

The idea of Masculinity in Igbo culture is flawed and this can be considered the limitation of Igbo culture. The protagonist of the novel, Okonkwo, perhaps unconsciously aligns himself with the sanctioned concepts of "Masculinity" and "Heroism" given by the society. The life of



Okonkwo's revolves around two basic things; the fear of failure and weakness and second thing was Okonkwo's desire and conquest to establish himself as one of the greatest and powerful man of the clan. This construction of strength and Masculinity of Igbo culture is against the values of love, affection and kindness. It also invalidates that environment in which these types of values could grow and mature. As a result he refused to show any type of affection that was considered as weakness. As it is mentioned in novel:

*"To show affection was a sign of weakness — the only thing worth demonstrating was strength. He therefore treated Ikemefuna as he treated everybody else — with a heavy hand."*

The life of a man in such culture which is constituted by ruthless masculinity and a desire for success in his society calls into question the dictatorial values of the whole society because his manhood is the function of the society in which he is living. Igbo society believes in the

- **Portrayal of Masculinity in "Things Fall Apart"**

Things fall Apart presents the belief that Africans have their own cultural identity and it is very different from the one that is established by the colonists for them. The traits that define masculinity in the novel are very close to the heroic behavior of the protagonist for example his ability of being superior over all other sexes. Okonkwo's is the head of the family and he rules his household with a heavy hand. Some scholars say about the presentation of masculinity in the novel that

**"Achebe drives men by the fear of appearing too womanly" (Hacht 519)**

Okonkwo's portrayal of masculinity is often characterized by traits such as strength, bravery, ambition, and an unwavering adherence to traditional customs and values. Here are some instances from the novel that highlight Okonkwo's manly behavior: He is known for his physical strength and his ability to defeat renowned opponents in the village. His physical strength is admired by the community and contributes to his reputation as a strong and masculine figure. In Igbo society, strength and aggression are valued traits in men. Okonkwo's wrestling victories and his success as a warrior and farmer earn him respect and status. However, his need to constantly assert his masculinity causes him to alienate those around him, including his family. Fearlessness is another trait that is possessed by Okonkwo's as a symbol of his manly behavior.



For example, during the Week of Peace, he beats his wife, Ekwefi, for not preparing his meal on time. This action demonstrates his strict adherence to traditional customs and his unwillingness to tolerate any perceived disrespect or negligence. The Igbo society values men who can provide for their families, participate in tribal ceremonies, and contribute to the community's defense. Even Okonkwo's not showed his kids any compassion. He was actually dissatisfied with his oldest son, Nyowe, as he lacked the aggression of his father. In order to make his son more manly, Okonkwo's told him tales of war, bloodshed, and violence. When the Oracle of the Hills and the Caves of Umuofia decided to kill his adopted son, Ikemefuna, Okonkwo's took part in the deed because he was so terrified of being called weak. He killed Ikemefuna despite the advice of his fellow citizens to abstain from the killing in order to avoid coming across as weak in front of others. In order to fulfill his benefits he was willing to kill his loved ones.

Furthermore, Okonkwo's involvement in battles demonstrates his valour. Many consider his warrior skills to be a key aspect of his manhood. He makes an effort to put his father's weakness and poverty behind him, concentrating instead on becoming a great man and a well-liked figure in Umuofia. Okonkwo puts great physical effort towards the protection of his people's customs such as worshiping of spirits and practicing and protecting culture. People in the society value him and regard him with much respect because he has a lot of respect for traditional ways, especially in the society's inclinations towards masculinity throughout. Such Stoicist characteristics of Okonkwo clarify the manly image depicted in the novel. He takes on a number of emotions, but most of the time he keeps them inside of himself, making a point to say that a man should keep calm and never be weak. Therefore, he tries to show that he is strong because to him courage means no weakness.

### **Conclusion**

Masculinity within the society as secondly portrayed In Achebe's Things Fall apart is an unbendable tool which often leads to destruction in the way the identity of individual, societies and cultures is defined. Okonkwo is able to carry the Igbo virtues of courage, resilience and self control to great heights; but these virtues are his downfall. Achebe goes on to show that it is indeed very dangerous to hold on to such patriarchal masculinity as shown in the personal



experiences of Okonkwo. The most prominent cuts at these misconceptions of masculinity focusses on and expounds on in particular women with the true demands on the women being a thing of the past. The book under review illustrates that there is now a need for a more flexible conceptualization of gender roles in response to social and cultural changes and the urgency of rigid gender roles made apparent through tragic outcomes. Okwonkwo eventually loses his life as a consequence of his masculine outlook on life.

### References

- “Anna’s Archive. (2024). Ropes of Sand: Studies in Igbo History and Culture - Anna’s Archive, [us.annas-archive.org/md5/2282d045415d924e0efc8a3d836e8d4a](https://us.annas-archive.org/md5/2282d045415d924e0efc8a3d836e8d4a).
- A Celebration of Black and African Writing / Edited by Bruce King and KolawoleOgungbesan National Library of Australia, [catalogue.nla.gov.au/Record/678916/Cite](https://catalogue.nla.gov.au/Record/678916/Cite). Accessed 9 June 2024.
- Achebe, C. (1986). *Things Fall Apart*. London: Heinemann.
- Akingbe, N. (2017). Countering Masculinity: Chinua Achebe’s *Things fall apart and the rise of feminist assertiveness in the novels of Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept* - R. W. Connell, James W. Messerschmidt, 2005, [journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0891243205278639](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0891243205278639). Accessed 9 June 2024.
- Irele, F. A. (2020). The crisis of cultural memory in Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, in *The African Imagination: Literature in Africa and the Black Diaspora*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 115-53.
- Jeyifo, B. (1993). Okonkwo and his mother: *Things Fall Apart* and issues of gender in the constitution of African postcolonial discourse, *Callaloo* 16(4): 847-58.
- Kapline, C., & Glover, D. (2000). *Genders*. London: Routledge
- Landi, A. G., Nkeiruka, E. G., & Umar, F. S. (2022). Antithesis of masculinity in the works of Chinua Achebe: the study of *things fall apart* and no longer at ease. *African journal of humanities and contemporary education research*, 3(1), 78–85.
- Nigerian female writers. *Studia Universitatis PetruMaior. Philologia*, 22, 81–87. <https://www.cceol.com/search/articledetail?id=1002924>
- Olney, J. (1972). *Metaphors of Self: The Meaning of Autobiography*. Princeton: Princeton UP,



Siddique, M., Kabi, J., & Nazrul, K. (2020). Portrayal of Masculinity in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. <https://doi.org/10.24113/ijellh.v8i1.10378>

Thompson, Edward H., et al. (2024). "Men and Masculinities: Scales for Masculinity Ideology and Masculinity-Related Constructs - Sex Roles." SpringerLink, Kluwer Academic Publishers-Plenum Publishers,

[link.springer.com/article/10.1007/BF02651094](https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/BF02651094). Accessed 9 June 2024.

Umezurike, U. P. (2021). "A son who is a man:" receptive masculinity in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. *NORMA*, 16(4), 205–216. <https://doi.org/10.1080/18902138.2021.1989935>

Williams, R. (1980). *Problems in Materialism and Culture: Selected Essays*. London: Verso.