THE REPRESENTATIONS OF TOXIC MASCULINITY IN *THINGS FALL APART* (1959)

By

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Abstract

Toxic masculinity refers to certain masculine behaviors and traits that can have adverse effects on both men and those around them. This study aimed to identify the concept of masculinity, forms, causes, and impacts of toxic masculinity on the protagonist, Okonkwo, and those around him in Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart, based on Connell's hegemonic masculinity theory. This qualitative study employed a textual analysis method and a close reading approach. The primary data for this study were drawn from the novel Things Fall Apart. The results indicated that in Igbo culture, masculinity is defined by the man's role as the primary leader and decision-maker within the family unit. Okonkwo exhibits several forms of toxic masculinity, including physical violence, dominance over women, misogyny, coercion, and homicide. Various factors, such as a dysfunctional family, exposure to violence, peer rejection, bullying, fear of weakness, and fear of failure influenced Okonkwo's behaviors. As a consequence, he suffered from depression, anxiety, and encouragement to violence, which ultimately led him to be aggressive to those around him, and this culminates in his suicide.

Keywords*: Gender-role, masculine, misogyny, social-construction, toxic-masculinity.*

Abstrak

Maskulinitas toksik mengacu pada perilaku dan sifat maskulin tertentu yang dapat berdampak negatif pada pria dan orang-orang di sekitar mereka. Studi ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi konsep maskulinitas, bentuk, penyebab, dan dampak *toxic masculinity* pada tokoh utama, Okonkwo, dan orang-orang di sekitarnya dalam novel *Things Fall Apart* karya Chinua Achebe berdasarkan teori Connell, yaitu maskulinitas hegemonik. Studi kualitatif ini menggunakan metode analisis teks dan pendekatan pembacaan mendalam. Data utama penelitian ini diambil dari novel *Things Fall Apart*. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa dalam budaya Igbo, maskulinitas ditentukan oleh peran pria sebagai pemimpin utama dan pengambil keputusan dalam unit keluarga. Okonkwo menunjukkan beberapa bentuk maskulinitas toksik, termasuk kekerasan fisik, dominasi terhadap wanita, misogini, paksaan, dan pembunuhan. Berbagai faktor, seperti keluarga yang disfungsional, paparan terhadap kekerasan, penolakan oleh teman sebaya, perundungan, ketakutan akan kelemahan, dan ketakutan akan kegagalan memengaruhi perilaku Okonkwo. Akibatnya, ia menderita depresi, kecemasan, dan dorongan untuk melakukan kekerasan, yang membuatnya menjadi agresif terhadap orang-orang di sekitarnya, dan pada akhirnya, hal ini berujung pada tindakan bunuh diri.

Kata kunci: Peran-gender, maskulin, misogini, konstruksi-sosial, maskulinitas-toksik.

A. INTRODUCTION

This study focuses on the protagonist, Okonkwo's toxic masculinity, and its consequences. The principal objectives of this research paper are to identify the concept of masculinity in the Igbo society, the forms of Okonkwo's toxic masculinity, the risk factors, and the influences of toxic masculinity on Okonkwo, the main character, and also those around him in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart,* based on the theory of hegemonic masculinity coined by Connell R. W (2005).

Several studies have been conducted on the novel *Things Fall Apart*, which explores various themes and aims. For instance, Biswas (2023) addressed the topics of cultural disintegration, violence, and toxic masculinity in his article. However, within the context of toxic

masculinity, he concentrated only on the relationships between Okonkwo and his children. Similarly, Banerjee (2022) examined how toxic masculinity manifests within the relationship between fathers and sons. Particular focus is given to the oppressive nature of male guardianship. Subsequently, Siddique (2020) and Tobalase (2016) examined Igbo society's diverse spectrum of toxic behaviors and cultural conflicts. However, these studies do not fully explore how other social identities, such as class, age, ethnicity, and colonialism, intersect with and shape masculinity. At the same time, Yu (2021) examined the abusive manifestations of masculinity through the character of Okonkwo. He did not directly address the concept of toxic masculinity, which refers to cultural norms that can be detrimental to both men and society. In addition, Erdağ (2015), in his research, examined the factors that led to the decline of the Umuofia tribe, as well as the protagonist, Okonkwo. Additionally, he analyzed the influence of Christianity, cultural shifts, and modernization on the Igbo society in the novel.

El-Dessouky (2010) investigated the conflict from internal and external perspectives, delving into the conflicts faced by the characters, particularly Okonkwo. He explored the theme of pursuing existence within a declining culture in the face of British dominance. Further, Paudyal (2022) studied the representation of traditional Nigerian culture, the conflicts arising from the introduction of a new culture, and the impact of colonialism on traditional Nigerian culture. In contrast, Ghimire (2023) focused on analyzing how Chinua Achebe utilizes various symbols to portray the tragic situation of the protagonist, Okonkwo, in the novel. In addition, he established a foundation for future investigations into the symbolic significance of the novel and enhances comprehension of the role of symbols in Achebe's work. Finally, Rahayu (2013) explored the portrayal of social class in the novel from a Marxist perspective. She argued that the novel presents a biased class society and accurately depicts various aspects of Igbo culture and structures within the historical context of colonization and changing social dynamics.

It can be concluded that the majority of the aforementioned studies focus on the conflict between classes and the culture of the Igbo tribe as well as toxic masculinity in a narrow context, specifically, within the

context of father-child relationships. Nevertheless, there has been no research that addresses the issue of toxic masculinity within the broader context of the novel. Therefore, this study endeavors to elucidate a wider contextual framework of toxic masculinity, which becomes the stance of this study. Thus, the significance of this study lies in its effort to elucidate the concepts, forms, causes, and consequences of toxic masculinity in a fictional narrative, *Things Fall Apart,* which can serve as valuable lessons for readers in real life.

According to Harrington (2021, 3), the term toxic masculinity was first coined by Shepherd Bliss as part of the Mythopoetic Men's Movement. This campaign aimed to encourage men to explore their emotions through the telling of myths and fairy tales, and to overcome any barriers that inhibit their emotional expression (Harrington 2021, 3; Rotundi 2020, 24). This movement is the reaction against the second wave of feminism, which demanded women's equality in aspects of law, economy, and society (Pascual-Leone et al. 2013, 85). In its development, toxic masculinity is used to portray "narrow ideas of masculinity that were holding men back instead of empowering them" (Vallie 2024). The main principle of masculinity is all about men's bodies or expressions of maleness. Men must be independent, dominant, and in control of everything that often leads to the abuse of power (Connell 2005, 67). Therefore, men with their hegemonic masculinity, which is harmful to themselves and others, are called toxic masculinity. These traits can be observed in the way men treat others. The study chose *Things Fall Apart* as the main data source as the main character in the novel indicates the trait of toxicity of masculinity throughout the plot of the novel.

Masculinity refers to the qualities and attributes traditionally associated with men (Pasaribu 2020, 50), involving physical, psychological, and behavioral characteristics (Rotundi 2020, 6). According to Auprasert (2012, 25) and Priola (2010, 546), masculinity is a field of study that examines the concept of manliness within a given society. Further, Salat (2017, 2) argued that masculinity encompasses various aspects, such as physical, functional, sexual, emotional, intellectual, interpersonal, and other personal traits. For example, masculinity is often defined by physical traits such as strength, bravery,

and athleticism, as well as intellectual qualities such as intelligence, logic, practicality, and rationality. To further understand the concept of masculinity, Connell (2005, 76) divided masculinity into four categories, namely, "hegemony, subordination, complicity, and marginalization masculinities". The concept of "hegemony" in masculinity is closely related to toxic masculinity since hegemonic masculinity emphasizes the domination of men as a whole.

This qualitative study used a textual analysis method with a close reading approach to analyze the novel. Close reading is defined as a careful reading and comprehension of a text to draw logical conclusions, supported by specific textual evidence (The National Governors Association (NGA) and The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) 2010, 11). In close reading, a reader scrutinizes literary and metaphorical meanings of a text, and this is a common element of close reading paradigms (Catterson and Pearson 2017, 459). Therefore, close reading can help the readers gain a deeper comprehension of the text being read (Saccomano 2014, 146; Lengyel 2014, 5). This study used the novel *Things Fall Apart,* authored by Chinua Achebe, as the primary source of data, and also some journal articles and relevant internet sources as the secondary data source.

This study employed steps outlined by Kurnia (2024) and Meilinda (2021) and adapted them to suit the specific study objectives. First, pieces of evidence found in the text were highlighted to facilitate the researchers when referring back to the text for evidence. The researchers, then, highlighted every chapter of the novel where the evidences were located, and for some long paragraphs, the researchers underlined or gave sticky notes to flag the idea. These techniques helped the researchers collect important notes and information from the novel that would be analyzed deeply. After being collected, the data were analyzed in several steps. Initially, the researchers comprehended the main character, Okonkwo's background, to understand the source of his toxic masculinity, then analyzed his behavior toward his family and others. The researchers finally identified and analyzed the forms of toxic masculinity, its underlying sources, and the impact on Okonkwo and those around him based on Connell's (2005) theory of hegemonic masculinity. which

emphasizes the domination of men as a whole over women, also Vallie's (2024) and Weiss' (2016) theory of toxic masculinity that stresses several masculine traits which lead to negative effects on men and those around them.

B. TOXIC MASCULINITY'S CONCEPT, FORMS, RISK FACTORS, AND INFLUENCES ON OKONKWO AND THOSE AROUND HIM

1. Toxic Masculinity

According to Weiss (2016), toxic masculinity is a set of standards that our society places on men, which ultimately harms men's lives and the lives of others by demanding that men must be strong, emotionless, and dominant over women. Sarah Vallie noted that masculinity is not inherently negative, however, as certain behaviors and mindsets associated with masculinity, such as valuing physical strength over other traits, possibly contribute to misogyny, and homophobia (Vallie 2024). Masculinity turns to be toxic when it is harmful to one's mental health or those around him (Grewal 2020, 7). It can be inferred that toxic masculinity is when several traits and behaviors of maleness give rise to a negative effect on both men themselves and the people around them.

The worst culmination of toxic masculinity is that it can lead to the encouragement of violence and other detrimental effects, such as discouragement of seeking help, the perpetuation of rape culture, homophobia, and misogyny by men (Weiss 2016). Further, toxic masculinity is not solely the fault of men, but rather a result of the patriarchal system that imposes gender roles on both men and women in the community (Weiss 2016). However, Mabrouk (2020, 420) argued that toxic masculinity is a direct result of teaching male children about stereotypes from a young age, which are fed by members of all sectors of society.

2. Masculinity in Traditional Society

According to Wikström (2019, 28), in traditional gender roles, men are often expected to exhibit toughness, both physically and mentally, and to

avoid showing vulnerability or emotion in public, such as crying. Traditional masculinity is typically defined by instrumental personality traits, such as aggression, self-affirmation, and social dominance, which may be accompanied by a lack of consideration for others (Yusupova 2023). This concept of masculinity is historically tied to systems of domination, including governmental, financial, military, and domestic power structures, and is rooted in the cult of power, property, homophobia, and sexism (Cunnell 2017). It is important to note, however, that masculinity is a complicated and dynamic concept that varies by culture and context and is not a fixed, essential quality of men (APA Division 51 2022; Cunnell 2017). Because masculinity exists in every culture, the term traditional masculinity then emerged. According to APA Division 51 (2022), traditional masculinity refers to a set of conventional standards and expectations for men that define what it means to be masculine in a given society.

David and Brannon (1976, 12) identified four key components of traditional masculinity as the following: men should not be feminine; men should be respected for their accomplishments and success; men should not show weakness; and men should be adventurous and risk-takers. These key components should be accepted and applied by men to be considered as real men. However, the internalization of the traditional masculinity concept can have negative impacts on men. Masculinity, while often regarded as a source of pride for those who accomplish it, can also become a burden for those who struggle to meet its expectations. The American Psychological Association (APA) states that conforming to traditional masculinity can lead to negative health outcomes, such as higher rates of suicide, drug abuse, violence, and premature death. Additionally, traditional masculinity is characterized by stoicism, competitiveness, dominance, and aggression (American Psychological Association 2018).   Therefore, this pressure often leads to the repression of emotions, which can contribute to mental health problems and refusal to seek assistance (Seattle Children's Press Team 2019).

3. The Factors and Consequences of Toxic Masculinity

The phenomenon of toxic masculinity is the result of a complex interplay of factors that can have profoundly negative impacts on individuals and extend to those around them. Vallie (2024) identified several factors that contribute to toxic masculinity, including "a dysfunctional family environment, exposure to social norms that promote violence and male dominance, exposure to violence at home, in relationships, and the community, a lack of access to mental health services, a lack of behavioral control, and social rejection by peers" (Vallie 2024). Moreover, toxic masculinity may have negative impacts on mental health, leading to anxiety, depression, and suicide. These impacts not only influence men but also women. It is based on a report on suicide rates by sex in the United States between 2018 and 2019 that revealed men committed suicide at a higher rate than women (Grewal 2020, 7). Further, men are more likely to commit suicide due to a negative stigma that discourages them from seeking psychological support. This perception can prevent men from seeking the assistance they need, including looking for therapy or attempting to improve their mental health is often perceived as a sign of weakness (Grewal 2020, 8).

4. The Concept of Masculinity in the Igbo Society

Okonkwo is the main character in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. He lived in the Igbo tribe, which is inherent to the patriarchal system. He was the primary protector of the family and bore the responsibility for the honor and sustainability of the family. This finding aligns with the perspective of Nonso Egbo, who posited that Igbo culture and values are deeply ingrained in traditional gender roles. Men are typically viewed as providers and decision-makers, while women are expected to be submissive to their husbands, perform housework and domestic chores, farm, and bear children (Egbo 2021). In a patriarchal society, the aspect of masculinity is tightly held by the members of society that men are considered superior to women. In relation to the Igbo society, the narrator said, "No matter how prosperous a man was if he was unable to rule his women and his children, he was not really a man" (Achebe 1959, 52). This excerpt implies that men should be dominant and become top leaders in

the family to organize their wives and children. This concept is consistent with one of Cunnell's (2017) key theoretical frameworks regarding traditional masculinity and Weiss' (2016) set standard of societies, which posits that males should embody dominant and leadership roles over females.

The Igbo people's earnings were from farming which yam was the main crop. According to Achebe (1959, 35), "Yam stood for manliness, and he who could feed his family on yams from one harvest to another was a very great man indeed". Therefore, "he wanted his son to be a great farmer and a great man. He would stamp out the disquieting sign of laziness, which he thought he already saw in him" (Achebe 1959, 35). Since endured challenging circumstances, he was strict and resolute when nurturing his children. His motivation behind this decision stems from his past, during which he had to work hard for other farmers before attaining wealth and status. He was assigned to grow yams and divide the crops with the land owner after harvesting time. Therefore, he wanted his children to be self-supported and did not want to see his children had the same fate as he had felt before. He educated his children from an early age on how to sort a good seed of yams and to grow yams in the field.

Okonkwo came from a poor family. His father was a musician thus he disliked working in the field like other villagers to provide provisions for his family. He owed much money to his friends and people in the village he knew because "his wife and children had barely enough to eat" (Achebe 1959, 10). Therefore, Okonkwo did not inherit any land or property from his father so he had to do anything to support his life. He also tried to gain respect of his clan as he would receive a high appreciation. In the Igbo tribe, "there were four titles in the clan and only one of two men in any generation ever achieved the fourth and highest. When they did, they became the Lords of the land" (Achebe 1959, 202). This wealth and high title motivated Okonkwo to educate his children to become rich and have a high title in the Igbo community. The Igbo tribe's understanding of masculinity aligns with the concept of traditional masculinity as described by APA Division 51 (2022), in which masculinity is shaped by the cultural values and social expectations of men by the local community.

5. The Forms of Okonkwo's Toxic Masculinity

Okonkwo's toxic masculinity is manifested through his violent temper and his lack of emotional expression. This aligns with Weiss' (2016) conceptualization that toxic masculinity prioritizes dominance and aggression over self-control. For example, the narrator said, "Whenever he was angry and could not get his word out quickly enough, he would use his fist" (Achebe 1959, 8–9). This violence further manifested within his household, where "His wives, especially the youngest, live in perpetual fear of his fiery temper, and so do his little children" (Achebe 1959, 17). He tended to prefer violence to negotiation when it comes to solving problems. This is relevant to Yusupova's (2023) idea that traditional masculinity exercises aggression accompanied by a lack of consideration for others. It can be seen in the following incidents, for instance, one day, in the Week of Peace, Okonkwo hit his youngest wife heavily even due to a trivial mistake. It was because his wife went to her neighbor to get her hair braided, but she did not return home early to cook for the afternoon meal. Moreover, he found his daughter was being fed by his elder wife. He struck her with no regard for the consequences of her actions, demonstrating a complete disregard for her well-being. The narrator said, "Okonkwo was not the man to stop beating somebody halfway through, not even for fear of a goddess" (Achebe 1959, 32). He was a temperamental and aggressive person when found something out of his expectations. It is generally accepted that individuals with a tendency towards emotional volatility are more likely to prioritize violence over dialogue.

In another case, when he learned his second wife cut banana leaves to wrap some food, he immediately beat her. It indicates that Okonkwo is an impatient person and unreceptive to counsel when consumed by anger. Following that, when his wife remarked on his unused gun, he rushed into his house, loaded the gun, and shot his wife. Fortunately, she was not severely injured. The aforementioned incidents demonstrate that Okonkwo considers women to be less important than men. Females are perceived as being frail or mediocre. His wives show an attitude of subordination to the dominance of men. This dynamic is described by Connell (2005, 90) as "hegemonic masculinity," which pertains to the

socially constructed norms and behaviors that are attributed to men in a patriarchal society.

Another incident that illustrates Okonkwo's ruthlessness includes the physical abuse of his son, Nwoye, after learning that he had converted to Christianity. Then he advised his other children not to follow the steps of his elder son by saying, "No, 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" (Achebe 1959, 157). Okonkwo's reliance on violence to assert authority reflects Weiss' concept of toxic masculinity, which demands dominance and emotional suppression at the expense of empathy or rationality (Weiss 2016). For example, when Ikemefuna refused to eat, Okonkwo coerced him by standing over him with a stick, a display of physical intimidation over negotiation. The culmination of Okonkwo's toxic masculinity is seen in his decision to kill Ikemefuna, despite warnings from the clan leaders. He acted out of fear of being seen as weak. This reflects Connell's idea of hegemonic masculinity, which pushes men to meet society's expectations of strength and dominance at any cost (Connell 2005, 70).

Okonkwo is dominant over women, his wives, and his daughters. All the decisions in everything are in his hands. Every resolution must be approved by him, which effectively limits the role of women, particularly his wives, in decision-making processes. It is consistent with the traditional gender roles posited by Wikström who stated men to be expected to exhibit toughness, both physically and intellectually (Wikström 2019, 28). This concept of masculinity is historically associated with systems of domination, including domestic power structures (Cunnell 2017). For example, his daughter, Ezinma had grown up and become one of the most beautiful girls in Mbanta. Therefore, many young men and prosperous middle-aged men came to marry her but all of them were rejected because her father disagreed if she married a man from Mbanta. He said, "There are many good and prosperous people here, but I shall be happy if you marry in Umuofia when we return home" (Achebe 1959, 158). It is Okonkwo's prerogative to select the individual with whom his daughter is to marry. As a man who held a high regard for

masculinity, Okonkwo sought a son-in-law who was genuinely masculine and held a respected position within the clan. The narrator said, "His future sons-in-law would be men of authority in the clan. The poor and unknown would not dare to come forth" (Achebe 1959, 158).

In addition, Okonkwo detested men who showed feminine traits, or is called misogyny, where men are often viewed as having certain qualities that are valued over those of women (Weiss 2016). It is proven in the novel when Okonkwo discussed the next ancestral feast with the men in his clan, a man in the forum had a different opinion from him and then he said, "This meeting is for men." It shows that Okonkwo implicitly addressed the man as a woman. In addition, "the man who had contradicted him had no titles; therefore, he had called him a woman. Okonkwo knew how to kill a man's spirit" (Achebe 1959, 29). Moreover, as an individual who attained the designation of "a man of war," he exhibited no apprehension regarding bloodshed and frequently engaged in violent actions against his opponents, sometimes resulting in their demise.

Later, on one occasion, after the incident of the church demolition by a group of Igbo people, Okonkwo and five leaders of the clan were captured and jailed. They were treated badly with no food and water, and they were not allowed to urinate. Moreover, their hair was shaven to be bald and they were hit by sticks on the head and back until bruised. Because of this incident, "Okonkwo was choked with hate" (Achebe 1959, 177). Therefore, after he was released, he neither ate nor slept well, and his heart was driven by the desire for revenge. It is relevant to Foss' (2020) and Grewal's (2020, 7) statement that toxic masculinity may harm one's mental health, like depression and anxiety. Then, Okonkwo assembled with the members of his clan to discuss something for revenge. Suddenly, a group of messengers came to dismiss the meeting, and Okonkwo became enraged and murdered one of the messengers with his machete. It seems that the inhumane handling in jail causes him to take revenge and murder one of them. This is consistent with the notion that an individual who has internalized toxic masculinity is more likely to respond with violence or aggression when confronted with violence or resistance from others (American Psychological Association 2018).

6. Okonkwo's Toxic Masculinity and Risk Factors

According to Vallie (2024), one of the factors that can trigger toxic masculinity is a dysfunctional family. It is when the parents fail to provide what the family members need that leads to an imbalance in the family life, worsening the relationship between the family members (Muhlisin and Sudewi 2023, 23). Okonkwo's personalities are influenced by his life in the past, in which he lived in a dysfunctional family environment and was raised by his lazy and indebted father, Unoka. He was poor and failed to provide his wife and son with their necessities because he spent most of his time having parties. He was a musician and good at playing flute and was often invited by the villagers, together with his band, to accompany the parties after harvesting time. His father's lack of responsibility leads to a deterioration in the relationship between Okonkwo and his father.

Even when Okonkwo was a little boy, he loathed his father's weakness and failure. Because of his father's flaw, he frequently received social rejection and bullying from his peers by saying that his father was "Agbala." The term "was not only another name for a woman, it could also mean a man who had taken no title" (Achebe 1959, 18). It is said that "when Unoka died he had taken no title at all and he was heavily in debt" (Achebe 1959, 12). In the villagers' eyes, Unoka is a coward when talking about war. He always changed the topic to music. It appears that he was afraid of war and blood. His father's defect left a traumatic feeling and shame in Okonkwo. Therefore, "his whole life was dominated by fear of weakness and anxiety of failure. It was the fear of himself, lest he should be found to resemble his father" (Achebe 1959, 18) and "he was possessed by the fear of his father's contemptible life and shameful death" (Achebe 1959, 22). Fortunately, "there existed a society in which individuals were considered based on their own merits and not merely under the status of their fathers" (Achebe 1959, 12). Consequently, Okonkwo tried to embody all aspects of social constructions in society to be a masculine man and to be accepted in social circumstances. Thus, Okonkwo was driven by an intense aversion to all his father's negative traits, including gentleness and idleness (Achebe 1959, 18). Okonkwo's risk factor for toxic masculinity is consistent with Vallie's (2024) idea that social

rejection and bullying by peers are crucial in influencing one's traits to become a toxic masculine.

Okonkwo was known to be strict with his wives and children. It is because the risk factors, such as the social norms in his clan, promoted violence and male dominance. For instance, there is a regular wrestling competition between young people in the clan to show their manliness. It is said that while Okonkwo was relatively young, he achieved the greatest wrestling title in the nine villages. Further, he was a wealthy farmer and had three wives. Due to his achievement and bravery, he was called "a man of action, a man of war" (Achebe 1959, 15). This predicate boosted his self-esteem to be an important person in his clan. The patriarchal system, which places men and their strength at the forefront of masculinity, has shaped Okonkwo into an aggressive figure who resorts to violence. This aligns with Vallie's (2024) concept that social norms that promote violence contribute to the manifestation of toxic masculinity.

Another factor that influences Okonkwo's toxic masculinity is the exposure to the violence of colonial domination and pressure which resulted in his violent and aggressive behavior, including physical fights, bullying, and other cruel acts toward others. The experience of violence often perpetuates a cycle, increasing the likelihood that victims will engage in violent behavior in the future (RSU Graha Bhakti Medika 2024). The white colonialists came to challenge the Igbo people's religious beliefs, disseminate a new religion, establish a government, and implement laws and punishments on the local population who were not subject to them. This prompted Okonkwo and other prominent figures within the Igbo community to take an aggressive stance towards the colonialists. Some leaders were inclined to adopt a conciliatory stance towards the colonialists, whereas Okonkwo and several other leaders were more assertive in their opposition to colonial rule, employing tactics that could be characterized as forceful and violent. Consequently, Okonkwo and his colleagues were compelled to engage in negotiations, which ultimately resulted in their capture and imprisonment for several days. They were released after their family paid the requisite ransom. It is after Okonkwo was freed from detention, on one occasion, he met and then assassinated one of the messengers who treated him cruelly when he was

in jail. The mistreatment he had endured had led Okonkwo to develop a negative sentiment toward them, which ultimately resulted in his decision to kill them. It seems that his experiences of colonial domination, violence, and pressure encouraged him to oppose them violently.

Consider comparing Okonkwo with Obierika in terms of their masculinity and attitudes. Obierika was a colleague of Okonkwo and also a member of a highly esteemed leaders in Igbo society. He was a contemplative and reflective individual, characterized by thoughtfulness and empathy, and demonstrated a more balanced approach to emotional expression. Moreover, he was capable of maintaining positive relationships with others, including Okonkwo, despite their differences in perspective. While Okonkwo was firmly grounded in physical strength and traditional masculinity, his social interactions frequently manifested as aggressive, dominant, and physically assertive behaviors.

Another character whose masculinity was not constituted by the conventional criteria for success was Unoka; consequently, he had no title in his life. Moreover, he was physically weak and unable to "bear the sight of blood" (Achebe 1959, 11). Nevertheless, he exhibited emotional depth and creativity, as well as the capacity to form and maintain positive interpersonal relationships. It is proven in the story that when he got money, he invited his neighbors to celebrate with palm wine and have it together. Occasionally, another village invited him and his band to reside with them and teach their musical expertise. He was also known for his appreciation of "the good fare and the good fellowship" (Achebe 1959, 9).

Okonkwo's conception of masculinity stands in clear contrast to that of the other two characters. It can be inferred that Okonkwo's traits represent a pure individual response to Igbo cultural norms and the influence of family upbringing and social struggles, such as rejection and bullying, as described by Vallie (2024).

7. The Detrimental Effects of Okonkwo's Toxic Masculinity

Toxic masculinity has harmed Okonkwo's mentality. As an example, after murdering his foster son, Ikemefuna, Okonkwo became depressed. According to Grewal and Foss, depression, anxiety, and other mental disorders could be triggered by toxic masculinity (Foss 2022; Grewal

2020, 7). These symptoms include loss of appetite, insomnia, and excessive wine consumption throughout the day. He tried to stop thinking about Ikemefuna, but the more he tried, the more he thought about him.

Subsequently, the effect of toxic masculinity not only harms the perpetrators, but also those around them. Okonkwo often treated his wives and children with cruelty, subjecting them to both physical and psychological suffering through corporal punishment or physical attack, but "they dare not to complain openly" (Achebe 1959, 18). It seems that his wives and children have internalized the traditional stereotype that places men are superior to women and that women must be submissive to men. The worst effect of Okonkwo's toxic masculinity is, he committed suicide. It was after he assassinated one of the messengers, and he knew that his people would not declare a war against the white people "because they had let the other messengers escape" (Achebe 1959, 185). Therefore, he was desperate and ended his life by hanging himself on a tree. Okonkwo's act of suicide is significant in the context of Foss's (2022) and Grewal's (2020) proposition that the detrimental impact of toxic masculinity can impair psychological well-being and culminate in depression and suicide. Additionally, his reluctance to seek assistance from friends and other individuals within his social sphere aligns with the findings presented by Weiss (2016), which suggest that those who exhibit toxic masculine behaviors often demonstrate a hesitation to seek help.

C. CONCLUSION

Based on the results and discussion, it can be inferred that the concept of masculinity in the Igbo society in which Okonkwo lived entails the primacy of men over women. Real manliness is not considered based on the prosperity of a man, but on how he can manage his wives and children.

The findings reveal several forms of toxic masculinity reflected in Okonkwo's behaviors, along with some risk factors that contribute to its emergence on both the protagonist and those around him. For example, Okonkwo exhibited toxic masculinity through physical violence, verbal violence, male dominance over women, coercion, misogyny, and homicide. Several risk factors had influenced Okonkwo's mental health, such as a dysfunctional family environment, exposure to social norms that

promoted violence in the community, as well as the idea that men are superior to women. Finally, Okonkwo's toxic masculinity has led him to feel depressed and a propensity for violence that ultimately culminated in his suicide. Okonkwo's toxic masculinity affects not only his life but also his children, his wives, and some white colonials. His wives and children suffered from physical violence and mental distress, while the white colonial lose their lives at his hands.

This study's primary focus on Okonkwo may limit the study to understand how masculinity functions across the different male characters in the novel or how women contribute to the construction of masculinity. Further research could investigate how different male characters (e.g., Obierika, Nwoye, Unoka) embody or resist hegemonic masculinity. The study would offer a more nuanced perspective on masculinity in Igbo society by illuminating variations in male identities and responses to cultural expectations.

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