



A Few Good Men: The Politics of Masculinity in Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*

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Abstract

This paper seeks to read into the nuances of masculinity in Chinua Achebe’s novels *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and *Arrow of God* (1964) and to understand how masculinity plays a crucial role in the power struggle between indigenous society and polity and the colonial administration. It attempts to explore the playing out of ‘hegemonic masculinity’ among the colonial administrators in their home country and how it percolates down to the Igbo people who find themselves wedged between disparate sets of gender dynamics and values in the wake of the establishment of the phallogocentric project of colonialism. It will engage with the intricate network of power and exhibitionism which go into the making of notions of hegemonic masculinity that are at odds with indigenous norms and manifestations of masculinity. It looks at masculinity as “simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experience, personality and culture” (Connell 2013: 253) within the ambit of relations forged between the coloniser and the colonised. ‘Hegemonic masculinity’ —“the the form of masculinity which is culturally dominant in a given setting” (Connell 2001:17)—can be seen as a key element that perpetuates new social norms which disrupt indigenous norms already in place. This necessitates a critical engagement with how the crisis in ways of “doing” masculinity inevitably leads to the crisis of disintegration of indigenous societies. This paper will attempt to trace the trajectory of this crisis and disintegration through a reading of the politics of masculinity in Achebe’s novels *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*.

Keywords

indigenous, gender, power, hegemonic masculinity

Chinua Achebe's novels have enjoyed monumental status in African Literature in English as testaments of the Igbo people's negotiation with an entirely new worldview imposed upon their indigenous knowledge systems by way of the epistemic violence effected by the colonial project in Nigeria. His novels are imbued with ethnographic, political, historical interventions into the misrepresentation of the Igbo people in existing literature and attitudes "through a haze of distortions and cheap mystifications" (Achebe 1990:18). This paper seeks to read into the nuances of masculinity in Chinua Achebe's novels *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and *Arrow of God* (1964) and to understand how masculinity plays a crucial role in the power struggle between indigenous society and polity and the colonial administration. It looks at masculinity as "simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experience, personality and culture" (Connell 2013: 253) within the ambit of relations forged between the coloniser and the colonised. It will read into the playing out of 'hegemonic masculinity', "the form of masculinity which is culturally dominant in a given setting" (Connell 2001:17), among colonial administrators which percolates down to the colonised who find themselves wedged between disparate sets of gender dynamics and values in the wake of the establishment of the phallogocentric project of colonialism. This paper takes cognizance of the argument that masculinity shares an intimate relationship with power and argues that it is the playing out of hegemonic masculinity in the colonies that testifies to this relationship:

Masculinity is power. But masculinity is terrifyingly fragile because it does not really exist in the sense we are led to think it exists, that is, as a biological reality—something real that we have inside ourselves. It exists as ideology; it exists as scripted behavior; it exists within "gendered" relationships. (Kaufman 1987:13)

Masculinity as ideology and scripted behaviour is imposed by garnering the consensus of the colonised vis-a-vis imperialism that was "ideologically cathected as social mission" (Spivak 1988:301). There exists an intricate network of power and exhibitionism which goes into the making of notions of masculinity that are at odds with indigenous norms and manifestations of masculinity in Achebe's novels. 'Hegemonic masculinity' can be seen as a key element that perpetuates new social norms which disrupt indigenous norms already in place. Given that the substantive effect of gender is "performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence" (Butler 1990: 24), one can observe how hegemonic masculinity seeks to establish a kind of gender coherence by acting out deeds that are to be

repeated by the colonised. It constitutes the repeated stylization of the body of the colonised that produces a “natural sort of being” (ibid: 33) whose colonisation is therefore naturalised. This necessitates a critical engagement with how the crisis in ways of “doing” masculinity inevitably leads to the crisis of disintegration of indigenous societies. This paper will attempt to trace the trajectory of this crisis and disintegration through a reading of the politics of masculinity in Achebe’s novels *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*.

Masculinity assumed a crucial role within the colonial project which was a strictly male one wherein men gloried in the seizing of land and resources not their own. The mysteries of the ‘dark continent’ that Africa was conceived as seemed to be co-terminous with the mysteries of the female body. While the female body came to be a metaphor of the colonised land (Loomba 2009:129), the colonial project came to be premised upon the mastery of the masculine over the feminine. Colonialism “produced a cultural consensus in which political and socio-economic dominance symbolized the dominance of men and masculinity over women and femininity” (Nandy 2009:4). The emasculation of the natives and the denigration of indigenous manifestations of masculinity therefore naturally followed suit.

Moreover, the “Other” space of the colony, a heterotopic space in Foucauldian terms, functioned as a “heterotopia of compensation” which was arranged and regulated as per the ideals valued by people in the mother country:

...their role is to create a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled. This latter type would be the heterotopia, not of illusion, but of compensation, and I wonder if certain colonies have not functioned somewhat in this manner. (Foucault 1984: 8)

Citing examples of the Jesuit colonies in South America, Foucault observed the meticulous planning of the colonies in a symmetrical row of cabins, a church, a school, a cemetery, the whole set up perfectly replicating the sign of the cross. Life was regulated by the church bell whose chiming regulated the activities of all.

Though Foucault’s concern was the organisation of terrestrial space, this arrangement of colonies went beyond simply architectural, spatial and temporal considerations. Life was ordered and regulated along the lines of the home country and its values and ideals. The imposition of gender norms of the home country on the colonies was therefore a crucial factor that went into the creation of heterotopias of compensation that the colonies became. One can observe how the colonies are purged of any other forms of masculinity which persist

alongside the normative ones endorsed by hegemonic masculinity and how the colonies are ordered around the idea of a swash-buckling, conquest driven, aggressive masculinity as the normative one. This was perhaps to compensate for the undeniable existence of other ways of “doing” masculinity back at home. The colony provides a golden opportunity for the administrators to start from scratch, since the space of the colony was rendered a blank slate wiped clean of its history, language, values and gender configurations. Umuofia in *Things Fall Apart* and Umuaro in *Arrow of God* can be read as heterotopias of compensation where colonial administrators like George Allan and Winterbottom seek a space that would compensate for the “messy, ill-constructed, jumbled” space that was their mother country.

‘Manning’ the Colonies: A Man-sized Job!

Colonial administration in Africa was a “man-sized” job (Oyewumi 1997:124) which demanded the kind of bravery and strength that would separate the men from the boys. Anthropologist Helen Callaway, in her study of the gender equation among the European administrators in Nigeria, argues how the colonial enterprise was a thoroughly male one:

Formed for the purpose of governing subject peoples, the Colonial service was a male institution in all its aspects; its ‘masculine’ ideology, its military organisation and processes, its rituals of power and hierarchy, its strong boundaries between the sexes. (Callaway 1987:6)

In this masculine set up, men were given the upper hand all along while women were seen as cumbersome and even dangerous for the project. Nigeria was a “man’s country” (Callaway 1987:4) wherein women were relegated to a separate, marginal sphere.

Until 1919, passages for wives to Nigeria were not paid for; pregnant women were sent home in advance of their delivery; no children were allowed to come to Nigeria (Callaway 1987). The colonial ambit was sanitised, as it were, by ridding it of the women and children. The ‘womenandchildren’¹, to borrow Cynthia Enloe’s phrasing (1990:166) were lumped together in a naturalised category defined by vulnerability, infantile naïveté, helplessness. The fact that they had zero usefulness when it came to ‘manning’ the colonies also did not help in considering their being able to stay on in Nigeria. Manning the colonies was no child’s play!

¹ Taking cue from Cynthia Enloe who speaks of media coverage of war victims in the context of the Gulf Crisis, the phrase seems to befit the awkward lumping together of women and children, both in the mother country and the colonies, in the same category. Enloe argues how the term “womenandchildren” “rolls easily off network tongues” conditioned by a pre-conceived and misguided notion that women and children are apolitical, naive victims of political violence. See *The Morning After: Sexual Politics at the End of the Cold War*. Berkeley: California University Press, 1993: 166.

Employment in the colonial administration was seen as a swash-buckling adventure spree for men in the colonies. Margery Perham's biography of Lord Lugard vividly illustrates this notion:

Lugard and his envoys seem to dash about the country like knight errants, punishing wicked people and liberating the oppressed, overthrowing cruel kings and elevating good ones. This was what Lugard willed to do and what he believed himself to be doing. (quoted in Callaway 1987:40)

The colonial service was built upon strict divisions of gender roles modelled upon British middle class notions of "sex arrangement" (Callaway 1987:14), right from preparatory school, public schools, military establishments or men's colleges of Oxford and Cambridge to adulthood in the London clubs.

While discussing colonialism and white masculinities, Robert Morrell (1998) argues that when colonial rule extended into Afrikaner and African territories from the late nineteenth century onwards, the fact that this extension was led by white British men hardly came as a surprise:

It is not incidental that the process was led by white British men, many of whom had a public school upbringing. It is also not incidental, then, that the notions of superiority and toughness taught in these schools were reflected in the way in which colonial rule was established. A willingness to resort to force and a belief in the glory of combat were features of imperial masculinity and the colonial process. (Morrell 1998: 616)

Africa was thus "culturally and materially subjected to a nineteenth-century European racial hierarchy and its gender politics; being indoctrinated into all-male European administrative systems and the insidious paternalism of the new religious and educational systems..." (Mama 1997:47).

In the construction of the premise of colonial administration as a distinctly male domain, one can see the playing out of 'hegemonic masculinity', "the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy which guarantees... the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (Connell 2013:257). This configuration of gender practice makes way for the establishment of "strong ideological boundaries" (Callaway 1987: 15) to protect the masculinity of the colonial project. Given that "at any given time, one form of masculinity rather than others is culturally exalted" (Connell 2013:257), the idea of a conquering, empire-building man who braves the disease-ridden deathly terrain of the tropics seems to have been

exalted during the heady days of the launching of the colonial project in Africa. This hegemony perhaps went on to be established because of the “correspondence between the cultural ideal and institutional power” (Connell 2013:257).

The cultural ideal at home which upheld Victorian notions of a domesticated femininity appeared to correspond with the institutional power of colonialism whereby the men assumed lead roles in administering the colonies. Only a man could be capable of “taming” a land that was feminised and perceived as a delinquent woman who could not keep up with the Victorian ideals of femininity back at home.

Masculinity thus came to involve a lot of exhibitionism in terms of control and aggression that was equated with power backed by the colonisers’ guns, handcuffs and bayonets that constituted their paraphernalia of power. Given that masculinity “inevitably conjures up notions of power and legitimacy and privilege” (Halberstam 1998: 2), the coloniser’s ideas of masculinity came to be seen as venerable and worthy of respect—the kind that got things done. This jarringly different notion of masculinity is perhaps what propelled Fanon, at the very outset of his work *Black Skin, White Masks*, to proclaim: “At the risk of arousing the resentment of my colored brothers, I will say that the *black is not a man*” (2008:1, emphasis mine).

The boys and the Men: the colonised and the Coloniser

For Baden-Powell, the founder of the Boy Scouts’ movement² (one which held the appeal of helping young boys become men of organised action), African men were simply not men:

The stupid inertness of the puzzled negro is duller than that of an oxen; a dog would grasp your meaning in one half the time. ‘Men and brothers’! They may be brothers, but they certainly are not men. (Baden-Powell, quoted in Uchendu, 2008: 1)

What Baden Powell was expressing was contempt for various African manifestations of masculinity. These manifestations of masculinity naturally depended upon cultural contexts and different historical trajectories. While for the Zulu, physical prowess, discipline and high morality came to connote masculinity, concealment of emotions symbolised by veiling of the face connoted masculinity among the Tuareg of Algeria. Non-patriarchal African hegemonic

² Scouting in the Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria was initiated in 1915, as the Scout Association of Nigeria. It became a member of the World Organisation of the Scout Movement in 1961. The British Governor-General of Nigeria, Lord Frederick Lugard brought Scouting to Nigeria on 21st November, 1915. Southern Nigeria in the initial phase of British colonialism witnessed great social change as the gradual replacement of indigenous institutions encouraged Yoruba and Igbo boys to support new social organisations.

masculinities were undermined by “colonialism, which was uniformly patriarchal in its verbal and non-verbal expressions and social exportations” (ibid: 13). As part of the “hidden curriculum” (Parsons 2004: 17) of colonialism, Scouting promoted certain forms of masculinity:

Although they would have objected strenuously to the suggestion that gender was socially variable, Baden Powell and the founders of Scouting were consciously aware that they were promoting a specific form of masculinity over a range of less desirable masculine identities. In their eyes, manliness meant physical courage, patriotism, stoicism, chivalry, and sexual continence. (Parsons 2004: 18)

Reordering gender roles was crucial to the consolidation of the colonial regime and Scouting addressed the resulting “gender chaos” (ibid) by promoting sanctioned concepts of masculinity. Ultimately it was the coloniser’s version of masculinity that triumphed as the best and only version. It was no wonder then that the natives were addressed as boys who could be ordered around and treated as juvenile delinquents in dire need of instructions. Workers at the Enugu Government Colliery in Southeastern Nigeria, for instance, were all trained to acknowledge that only Europeans could be men:

Then all African workers were titled boy, for example, timber man was called timber boy, peak (sic) called peak boy, tub man called tub boy. Everything, boy, boy! Only the Europeans were called overman and foreman. (quoted in Brown, 2006: 35)

Ideas of masculinity, initiation from boyhood into manhood, and definitions of boys and men which already existed among the natives were grossly ignored and undermined:

In the late nineteenth century conflict emerged between masculine norms articulated with wealth and more established models based on age and kinship. The dominant type of masculinity was based on age and consisted of senior men, ordinary fathers, and elders who headed extended families of several wives and children. As patriarchs they utilized the labor-power of their sons, who in turn relied on their fathers for the resources to marry. It was only after marriage that a man was considered socially mature. To become a man, a "boy" was dependent upon his father's capacity (and willingness) to finance the series of rituals and obligations accompanying his initiation into manhood and later to help him pay the bride price in marriage and to acquire land for his

own homestead. This relationship of dependence was a potential source of tension between fathers and sons, most especially in those areas (Agbaja) where land was scarce. Under colonialism young men tried to position themselves to benefit from new opportunities for personal autonomy to reduce their dependence on their fathers or village elders for resources necessary to become socially mature. (Brown 2006: 38)

Colonial intervention exacerbated the inter-generational conflict between boys and their fathers by enabling young boys to earn their own keep. Norms of sociability, social hierarchy, of mutual respect across age groups went haywire. Notions of self and society quickly turned into notions of self versus society as fathers and sons fell out with one another. Fathers came to be seen as overbearing ageing patriarchs puffed up with pride refusing to let their sons choose their own destinies. All this led to the escalation of tensions across generations, across villages and communities and went into the weakening of indigenous social structures, a phenomenon that Achebe aptly engages with in his novels.

A Few Good Men: *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*

For the great warrior Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart*, ideal masculinity connotes aggression, action and assertiveness. He finds values of Igbo masculinity getting eroded day by day as the white missionaries impinge on their daily affairs. It is no wonder that when the missionaries come to Umuofia, they first attract the men who did not enjoy the respect of their clansmen. Real men, in Okonkwo's opinion, would be sure of themselves and their gods. Many leaders also believed that the white man's deity was not a lasting one:

None of his converts was a man whose word was heeded in the assembly of the people. None of them was a man of title. They were mostly the kind of people that were called *efulefu*, worthless, empty men. The imagery of an *efulefu* in the language of the clan was a man who sold his matchet and wore the sheath to battle. Chielo, the priestess of Agbala, called the converts the excrement of the clan, and the new faith was a mad dog that had come to eat it up! (Achebe 2000: 101)

The converts are the men who enjoy no respect within their clan. They are "empty" men who are referred to by Chielo in scatological terms. A woman castigating a man in this way—even an empty one—is rare and unprecedented.

When tensions spark between the people of the church and the people of the clan, the colonial government intervenes to protect the missionaries. The hitherto “empty” men who enjoyed no respect in Igbo society were now protected and even valued.

Okonkwo’s call to action in order to delimit the activities of the white man falls on deaf ears:

‘Let us not reason like cowards,’ said Okonkwo. ‘If a man comes into my house and defecates on the floor, what do I do? Do I shut my eyes? No! I take a stick and break his head. That is what a man does. These people are daily pouring filth over us, and Okeke says we should pretend not to see.’ Okonkwo made a sound full of disgust. This was a womanly clan, he thought. Such a thing could never happen in his fatherland, Umuofia. (Achebe 2000: 113)

For Okonkwo, masculinity entailed proactive and assertive participation in village affairs. A real man would take up arms against social miscreants and nip any problem in the bud. The men in Mbanta decide to ostracize the converts instead of chasing them out of the village. Their womanly passivity disgusts Okonkwo who pines for his fatherland where “men were bold and warlike” (115). He longs for the day he would be able to go back home to his fatherland after his exile got over. He makes preparations for the return and sends money to his friend Obierika requesting him to build temporary shelters for his family in Umuofia. He had resolved to build his house himself, and do things like a man: “He could not ask another man to build his own *obi for him*, nor the walls of his compound. Those things a man built for himself or inherited from his father” (115).

As he prepares to return to his fatherland, Okonkwo arranges for a lavish feast for the people in Mbanta as a token of gratitude. Okonkwo is praised by the elders for “doing things in the grand, old way” (118). Okonkwo is in many ways the last man standing, the lone man upholding grand old traditions that are getting denigrated day after day. As the oldest man in Mbanta acknowledges Okonkwo’s generosity, he posits the wisdom of Okonkwo against the corrupt wisdom of the younger people who profess they are wiser than their elders.

Okonkwo aspires to “return with a flourish” (121) to his village after his exile, build big huts and a bigger barn and to make a show of his wealth by initiating his sons into the *ozo* society. Okonkwo also sees himself taking the highest title in the land after establishing himself securely in his fatherland. When Okonkwo returns to Umuofia, he is greatly disappointed to find that the White man has already laid hold of his people. When he tells Obierika they must fight, he is told that it is too late:

‘It is already too late,’ said Obierika sadly. ‘Our own men and our sons have joined the ranks of the stranger. They have joined his religion and they help to uphold his government. If we should try to drive out the white men in Umuofia we should find it easy. There are only two of them. But what of our own people who are following their way and have been given power? They would go to Umuru and bring the soldiers, and we would be like Abame’. (Achebe 2000: 124)

Okonkwo’s clanspeople had heard of the hanging of Aneto for committing a murder and were afraid. The white man embodied a higher order of power which seemed to surpass the power of the Earth whom they believed would mete out retributive justice to Aneto’s victim, Udoche. Hanging a man instead of letting the Earth intervene was something the clanspeople had never heard of before. Thus they are in awe of the powerful white man and they consider it better to go over to the white man’s camp, forging a “relationship of complicity with the hegemonic project” (Connell 2013: 258) of the white men. These are “masculinities constructed in ways that realize the patriarchal dividend, without tensions or risks of being the frontline troops of patriarchy” (ibid). Okonkwo’s clansmen realise there are many benefits to be had—the patriarchal dividend—by way of associating with the white man and following the path of compromise and least resistance.³

When Ogbuefi Ugonna, a man who had taken two titles, strips his titles and joins the Christians, it is clear that the church is no longer a marginal establishment of outcasts, the *efulefu* or empty men. Masculinity takes on new dimensions with Ugonna’s entry into the fold of the missionaries. The church and the government of the white man are arsenals of power and this power is even worth the shedding of titles that men had worked towards all their life.

Okonkwo is deeply grieved and he mourns for the clan and “for the warlike men of Umuofia, who had unaccountably become soft like women” (129). He is greatly burdened by the fact that “worthy men are no more! ... those were the days men were men” (141).

When Okonkwo realizes that his men have lost the courage to draw their matchets and ward off their enemy, he decides to kill himself. He kills himself knowing full well that it is an abomination and an offence against the Earth. He chooses a disgraceful death over a

³ Connell defines patriarchal dividend as “the advantage men in general gain from the overall subordination of women” in his essay “The Social Organization of Masculinity” (2013:258). Given the emasculation and feminisation of the colonised, the concept of the patriarchal dividend can also be extended to the situation in the colonies where there are many benefits to be had by aligning oneself with the white ‘Man’.

disgraceful life. His death is the ultimate act of resistance Okonkwo puts up, an indictment of the white man's norms of masculinity.

Obierika acknowledges Okonkwo as being one of the greatest men in Umuofia and regrets deeply the fact he would be denied the burial rituals fit for a man of his stature: "That man was one of the greatest men in Umuofia. You drove him to kill himself; and now he will be buried like a dog..." (147). There was really no way in which Okonkwo could be a "man" in the new scheme of gender roles brought on by the white man. Fanon makes a profound argument in *The Wretched of the Earth*: "From the moment that you and your like are liquidated like so many dogs, you have no other resource but to use all and every means to regain your importance as a man" (Fanon 1963: 295). Okonkwo has no other resource but to kill himself to try and regain his importance as a man.

In *Arrow of God* (1964) Ezeulu is the Chief Priest of a masculine deity Ulu, who administers to a conglomeration of six villages that had taken the name of Umuaro and installed the deity Ulu to protect themselves from soldiers of Abam who had been striking terror in the villages. Achebe had based this novel on an "actual incident" (Innes 1978:18) with the figure of Ezeulu inspired by a real life chief priest who had refused to be appointed as a warrant chief. The system of warrant chiefs in Nigeria was introduced by the British administration as early as the year 1900. It was devised as a means of controlling the colonies effectively, without having to spend a lot of resources on white men who were few and far between, and susceptible to attract undue attention and allegations of trying to reform the indigenous structures radically. It was best to rule through local institutions already in place, by choosing men who would "co-operate" with the administration. The division of Igboland into Native Court Areas based on the model of the colonial administration led to the dilution of the time-tested authority of the indigenous polity. Often unrelated villages were lumped together in these Court Areas. Colonial officials were authorised by the 1900 Native Courts Proclamation No.9 to establish native courts and local administrators (Chuku 2009). Warrant Chiefs were chosen to represent each village. This of course led to many unwelcome situations because even men who were of no consequence rose in power and influence once they became complicit in this system of indirect rule. The grip of the empire was ubiquitous in a cleverly unobtrusive way. One sees hegemonic masculinity playing out in and through the system of Warrant chiefs too, whereby men were complicit in the subjugation of their own people for the many benefits to be had overnight, the 'patriarchal dividend' of the empire.

Ezeulu, however, is not one to be swayed by such short term gains by abandoning his office as the Chief Priest of Ulu, a powerful deity who had to be accorded the obeisance due to him. He thus makes bold to refuse the British administration's proposition to make him the Paramount Chief, telling Clarke that he would not be anybody's chief, except that of Ulu:

'Tell the white man that Ezeulu will not be anybody's chief, except Ulu.'

'What!' shouted Clarke. 'Is the fellow mad?'

'I think so sah,' said the interpreter.

'In that case he goes back to prison.' Clarke was now really angry.

What cheek! A witch-doctor making a fool of the British Administration in public! (Achebe 2010: 176)

Ezeulu is set on not acceding to the white man's demand because he understands that the white man is seeking to consolidate his 'gorgment' in Umuaro and the neighbouring villages. As Chief Priest, he "can see where other men are blind" (133) and he feels the need to put his foot down even it means being imprisoned and inviting the ire of the white man. Moreover, one sees the great sense of responsibility Ezeulu harbours towards his community and land, which was fast being controlled through the system of Indirect Rule vis-a-vis local chiefs authorised by the British administration:

...the most effective and cheapest means of consolidating their rule in Nigeria was governing through the traditional rulers and institutions of the people reorganised to meet the changed needs and requirements of the new regime. The effective-ness of Indirect Rule, as this system is popularly called, was so widely recognised in British colonial circles that nearly every British Governor of a British West African dependency tried to implant it in one form or another. By 1900 it was being implemented in different forms in the Protectorates of "Southern Nigeria", Lagos and Northern Nigeria. (Afigbo 1971:438-439)

One sees that Ezeulu is at a crucial juncture in the history of his people—where opportunistic men are growing in prominence and influence by being a part of this system of Indirect Rule. He takes it as his moral responsibility as the Chief Priest to turn down this otherwise lucrative offer and see that his people are safe. Ezeulu is not fazed by the power of the white man 'borrowed' from guns and handcuffs. Power for him is not borrowed but inherent in their deities, in the Earth, in himself. He is thrilled to reflect on the power he has had over the years to declare feasts and harvests. His access to power is one that is warranted by his beliefs. When the coloniser comes in with a new set of beliefs, he finds that his notions of

masculinity and his access to power are jeopardised. This to a certain degree explains Ezeulu's refusal to announce the New Harvest festival which contributes greatly to his downfall.

With regard to the land dispute between Okperi and Umuaro, Ezeulu tells his men that it would not be honourable to fight over land that rightfully belonged to Okperi. There are many detractors. Nwaka who is chief among them, convinces people that Ezeulu wants to be "priest, king, diviner, all" (28) and that they need to defy him and show him his place. Nwaka's plan turns out to do more harm than good when the administrator Winterbottom rules the case in favour of Okperi.

Winterbottom and his men intervene in this war between Umuaro and Okperi and ask soldiers to break the natives' guns as they look helplessly on. This incident is striking because of the physical destruction of the guns which are symbols of power to the natives. Winterbottom goes down in collective memory as the "Otiji-Egbe", the "Breaker of Guns" (38). There is even a new age-grade of the Breaking of the Guns to which children born in that year belong. Winterbottom establishes his authority over the weapons of the natives which are rendered powerless. The gun, a phallic symbol of power is crushed, suggesting the total emasculation of the natives. Handcuffs also become a potent symbol of rendering the natives powerless:

In the eyes of the villager handcuffs or *iga* were the most deadly of the white man's weapons. The sight of a fighting man reduced to impotence and helplessness with an iron lock was the final humiliation. It was a treatment given only to violent lunatics. (Achebe 2010: 154)

Rendering a man impotent by way of handcuffs was the ultimate act of aggression that was meted out to the clansmen.

Ezeulu and the other clansmen develop a high regard for Winterbottom. They are in awe of his authority and power which are on full display every year on Empire Day⁴ when he wears a white uniform and sword. All this pomp and show established him securely as the King's representative in the district. Colonial administrators were very specific and conscious about letting people know of the power they held through ceremonious dressing and lavish celebrations on important occasions (Callaway 1987). Dinners were made into extremely formal occasions for which one had to take arduous pains to dress despite the heat in the

⁴ Empire Day, the birthday of Queen Victoria, was celebrated with great exuberance on the 24th of May every year. In Achebe's experience, it was a major event when children of all schools would march past the British resident who would stand on the dais wearing a white ceremonial uniform complete with gloves, a sword and a plumed helmet. See *The Education of a British-Protected Child*. New York: Anchor Books, 2011: 13-14.

colonies. Tony Clarke, the Assistant District Officer finds it rather trying to dress formally for dinner, but dress he must.

For most of the natives, the white man represents the quintessence of power-invested masculinity. However, Ezeulu is too strong a man to be cowered down by such displays of power. When Ezeulu is set free by Clarke after being held prisoner, he laughs one of his rare belly-deep laughs and mocks the white man:

‘So the white man is tired?’

‘I thought he had more fight than that inside him’,

‘The white man is like that,’ said the Chief Clerk.

‘I prefer to deal with a man who throws up a stone and puts his head to receive it, not one who shouts for a fight but when it comes he trembles and passes premature shit.’

The two men seemed by the look in their faces to agree with this too. (Achebe 2010:180)

For Ezeulu, the white man is someone who only makes dramatic proclamations of power and threatens without conviction. The white man is not really a “man”.

Ezeulu is adamant about not declaring the dates of the yam harvest. This is his way of asserting his power. He tells his faithful friend Akuebe that it was their people who had decided to join the white man, and they were responsible for provoking the wrath and silence of Ulu: “‘What do you expect me to do?’ Ezeulu opened both his palms towards his friend. ‘If any man in Umuaro forgets himself so far as to join them let him carry on.’” (Achebe 2010: 222).

Ezeulu comes to know that the white man had offered his people immunity against a rotten harvest by asking them to bring their first fruits to the church. People were so desperate to save their crops that they sent their yams to Mr. Goodcountry’s establishment in large numbers:

In his extremity many a man sent his son with a yam or two to offer to the new religion and to bring back the promised immunity. Thereafter any yam harvested in his fields was harvested in the name of the son. (Achebe 2010: 232)

In the end, all of Ezeulu’s warnings and protestations come to nothing. The white man had already gained the consensus of most of his clanspeople by offering them a safe harvest in return for their autonomy in the long run. Ezeulu was already privy to this plan and the

dismal future of his land and people but nobody cares to listen to the man who had rightly said: “I can see tomorrow” (133).

Conclusion

Both Okonkwo and Ezeulu seem to be among the few Igbo men who contest and dispute the dictates of hegemonic masculinity which deemed their indigenous ways of doing masculinity and performing gender roles void of any value. They reject the infantilisation and emasculation that they are subjected to. But the irony of the situation is that these bastions of dominant Igbo masculinity are cruelly ridiculed by their own people whose complicity betrays them. They are simply dismissed by colonial officials who plan to make an example of them because of their deviance. While Okonkwo dies a shameful death, Ezeulu is rendered redundant as he becomes a “demented high priest” (232).

The District Officer George Allan plans to write a chapter about Okonkwo in his book *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger*. On second thoughts, he decides to “be firm in cutting out details” (148) and let Okonkwo have a paragraph in his book, which later goes on to serve as a manual for the Assistant District Officer in *Arrow of God*. One sees how the story of a great man like Okonkwo is cruelly cut short in the ‘official version’ of the administrators.

Both Okonkwo and Ezeulu try to contest the norms of hegemonic masculinity imposed on their people but they find that their people have already been convinced of the greater benefits of being in the good books of the handful but powerful white men. Okonkwo is not heeded by his clanspeople who break into “tumult instead of action” (145) even as he strikes down the white man’s messenger. Ezeulu’s downfall is interpreted as a consequence of his ambition and his clanspeople fail to see the intervention of the white man in all that transpires. The white men had gained the consensus of the people of Umuofia and Umuaro despite initially earning the ire of the people and even losing one to murder:

“Hegemonic masculinity is not stable. It is constantly responding to challenges, accommodating, or repelling rival representations of masculinity. In this process it depends less on straight coercion and more, as Gramsci argued, on developing a consensus.” (Morrell 1998: 608)

In both novels the clansmen are intrigued by the massive influence exerted by the white man’s way of “doing” masculinity complemented by his paraphernalia of power—guns, handcuffs, a government. They are naturally driven to a relationship of complicity and consensus, abandoning men like Okonkwo and Ezeulu who seek to dispute their complicity.

Okonkwo is driven to kill himself when his appeal to his people to act like Igbo men and fight for their land falls on deaf ears. Ezeulu is categorised as a mad man who lets his delusions of power and grandeur render him insane. Okonkwo and Ezeulu come to be among the “few good men” who uphold and stand by traits of dominant Igbo masculinity in the heterotopic space of the colony ordered according to the traits favoured by the mother country. They refuse to fall in line with this new order of things introduced in a world of men who are treated like boys. Perhaps it would not be too much to ask if the Igbo people’s history and Achebe’s stories would have taken a different turn if these great men were not inducted into a world where men were treated like boys—a world that was falling apart.

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