Traditional African Masculine Ideals and Gender Roles in Reclaiming African Masculinity in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's *A Grain of Wheat*

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Abstract: African masculinity is a complex and many-sided concept that has been shaped by historical and cultural, and colonial factors. The position of men in the society remains to be a fundamental role to the wellbeing of every community. With colonialism affecting the perspective of masculinity in the African communities, there has subsequent resistance exhibited by male characters in the selected literary works. The current study focused on analyzing the traditional African masculine ideals and gender roles in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *A Grain of Wheat*. The study was guided by postcolonialism theory, which focuses on power dynamics and relationships between colonizers and the colonized. Being a qualitative study, the study employed descriptive research design, and conducted a thorough textual analysis, to highlight key issues in relation to masculinity in the African context. Purposive sampling was used to select the aforementioned text, so as to suit the needs of the researcher. The findings revealed that traditional African masculinity, characterized by strength, leadership, and adherence to cultural norms, faced significant disruption and redefinition due to colonial forces, with resistance efforts often reinforcing these ideals as a means of reclaiming identity and cultural integrity. It was also noted that colonialism profoundly disrupted African masculine identities by eroding traditional roles and authority, creating a deep sense of powerlessness and identity crisis among men as colonial systems imposed foreign norms and undermined their cultural and social structures. The study concludes that the resistance displayed by male characters in reclaiming African masculinity, amidst the disruption caused by colonial forces, underscores a critical postcolonial struggle to restore cultural identity, dignity, and autonomy.

Keywords: Masculinity, African, Ideals, Gender, Roles, Reclaiming.

1. Introduction

African masculinity encompasses various ideals, behaviors, and expectations associated with manhood in African societies. Understanding African masculinity requires an exploration of its historical and socio-cultural context, including the impact of colonialism and the pre-colonial understanding of masculinity. During the era of colonialism, European powers imposed their own masculine ideals and disrupted traditional African gender roles (Mudimbe, 1988). This imposition resulted in a clash between Western standards and indigenous understandings of masculinity, leading to the questioning and reevaluation of African male identity.

In pre-colonial Africa, masculinity was widely perceived and often associated with traits such as strength, courage, honor, and communal responsibility. Male identity was deeply intertwined with concepts of power and authority within the community (Mbiti, 1969). African societies had diverse expressions of masculinity, influenced by factors such as age, lineage, and warrior traditions. However, the arrival of colonial powers disrupted these established norms, challenging the stability and perception of African masculinity. Men played essential roles in the economic, political, and social spheres, contributing to the well-being and stability of their communities (Mudimbe, 1988).

The advent of colonialism had a profound impact on African masculinity, reshaping traditional gender roles and introducing new dynamics. European colonial powers imposed their own ideals and standards of masculinity onto African societies, leading to a clash with existing indigenous conceptions of manhood. This imposition of Western masculinity norms disrupted the social fabric and power dynamics within African communities (Cooper, 1996).

Under colonial rule, African cultural practices were systematically eroded and suppressed. Indigenous rituals, initiation ceremonies, and practices that played a vital role in the construction and transmission of masculine identities were marginalized or abolished altogether. The erasure of these cultural practices not only resulted in the loss of ancestral knowledge but also undermined the foundations of African masculinity (Mudimbe, 1988).

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European colonizers propagated a masculine ideal rooted in notions of dominance, rationality, and control. This ideal stood in contrast to the diverse understandings of masculinity found in pre-colonial African societies. Traditional African masculinities emphasized communal responsibilities, interconnectedness, and harmonious relationships with nature and the community (Mbiti, 1969). Colonialism introduced new social, economic, and political structures that further challenged indigenous conceptions of manhood. The arrival of colonial powers disrupted existing power dynamics within African communities, often undermining the authority of male leaders and reshaping the roles and responsibilities of African men. Colonial governments appointed new leaders who aligned with their interests, thereby eroding traditional systems of governance and diminishing the influence of male figures (Cooper, 1996).

The imposition of Western masculinity norms also impacted African men's access to resources and economic opportunities. The colonial economic system marginalized traditional African livelihoods and forced African men into exploitative labor conditions. The shift from communal modes of production to cash-crop agriculture or wage labor disrupted traditional gender roles, undermining the economic independence and status of African men (Cooper, 1996). In response to these impositions and disruptions, African masculinities underwent a process of reconfiguration and reinterpretation. Some African men resisted the colonial ideals, seeking to reclaim and reaffirm their traditional masculine identities. Others adapted to the changing circumstances, navigating the complexities of both traditional and colonial influences to construct hybrid masculinities (Mudimbe, 1988).

Following independence, African nations embarked on a process of sociopolitical and cultural reclamation. Postcolonial scholars and activists emerged as key voices in the reimagining of African masculinity, seeking to challenge Eurocentric representations and redefine African male identity (White, 2002). This movement aimed to dismantle the legacies of colonialism and reclaim indigenous African masculinities that were marginalized or suppressed during the colonial era.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *A Grain of Wheat*, set during the Mau Mau uprising against British colonial rule, offers further insight into African masculinity. The novel presents a range of male characters who grapple with their own understanding and expression of masculinity within the context of nationalist struggles, political upheaval, and personal dilemmas (Ngugi, 1967). The novel examines the lives of various characters in a Kenyan village, exploring themes of betrayal, sacrifice, and the struggle for liberation. Ngugi wa Thiong'o highlights the complex interactions between the colonized and the colonizers, as well as the internal conflicts within the African community itself. The novel explores the role of African men in the fight for independence, their individual struggles with identity and loyalty, and the postcolonial challenges faced by a nation in transition.

Chinua Achebe's novel, Things Fall Apart, provides valuable insights into African masculinity in the context of colonialism. The protagonist, Okonkwo, embodies traditional masculine ideals, including physical strength, bravery, and dominance (Achebe, 1958). However, as colonial influence grows, Okonkwo struggles to reconcile these ideals with the changing social dynamics, leading to a questioning and reevaluation of African masculinity. Okonkwo's character represents the tensions and complexities faced by African men as they navigate the impact of colonialism on their identities and traditional gender roles.

The current paper highlights the traditional African masculine ideals, examine the impact of colonialism on African masculinity, and explore the possibilities for reclaiming African male identities within the narratives.

2. Theoretical Framework

The current study was guided by Postcolonial theory, which is a multidisciplinary field that has been shaped by the contributions of various scholars. Postcolonial theory is a critical framework that emerged in the mid-20th century and provides a lens for analyzing the cultural, political, and social consequences of colonialism (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2013). It examines the power dynamics and relationships between colonizers and the colonized, the impacts of colonization on the colonized societies, and the ongoing legacies of colonialism in postcolonial contexts. Two prominent figures often recognized as pioneers of Postcolonial Theory are Edward Said and Homi K. Bhabha. Said (1978) examined how Western scholars and artists constructed and represented the Orient, emphasizing the power dynamics and the perpetuation of stereotypes within colonial discourse. His work laid the foundation for postcolonial studies by highlighting the ways in which colonialism influenced knowledge production and cultural representations.

According to Bhabha (1994), Postcolonial Theory challenges the binary oppositions and essentialist notions imposed by colonial powers. It highlights the hybridity and complexity of cultural identities and the ways in which they are negotiated and contested within postcolonial contexts. In the context of the study, Postcolonial Theory allows for an exploration of how colonialism disrupted traditional African gender roles and imposed Western ideals of masculinity. It assists in understanding the power dynamics and cultural encounters that shape African masculinities (Bhabha, 1994).

By highlighting the ways in which colonialism disrupted and reshaped traditional African gender roles and ideals of masculinity, the theory helps achieve the objective of the paper. European colonial powers imposed their own norms and standards of masculinity, often in conflict with indigenous conceptions (Cooper, 1996). By examining the representation of traditional African masculinity in the texts and analyzing the effects of colonialism, the study can uncover the tensions and transformations within African gender roles. Postcolonial theorists argue that colonialism led to the erasure of African cultural practices and the imposition of Western ideals, prompting a reconfiguration of African masculinity (Mudimbe, 1988).

3. Materials and Methods

The current study employed descriptive research design. The descriptive research design offered a comprehensive and in-depth depiction of a particular phenomenon or subject under investigation, enabling a thorough exploration and comprehension of the research topic. Smith (2018) suggests that descriptive research is especially valuable in the field of literary analysis as it permits researchers to meticulously observe and record the attributes, patterns, and connections found within texts. The study targeted all the literary works done by Chinua Achebe and Ngugi wa Thiongo's literary novels works. The study used purposive sampling, where the researcher deliberately selected a sample based on specific criteria that are relevant to the research objective. Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *A Grain of Wheat* have been chosen as they are widely regarded as seminal works in African literature and have extensively explored the themes of masculinity and identity. In the current study, the primary data collection method was systematic textual analysis of Chinua Achebe's "Things Fall Apart" and Ngugi wa Thiong'o's "A Grain of Wheat." The researcher carefully read and analyzed the selected texts, focusing on specific passages, dialogues, and character interactions that pertain to the portrayal of male identity and the themes of African masculinity and resistance. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the obtained data. The identified themes and sub-themes were supported by relevant textual evidence and quotations from the novels. Themes related to male masculinity and the characterization of male characters were clearly outlined. The researcher engaged in a close examination of the context, language, and narrative techniques used in the texts to provide a rich and nuanced analysis of the portrayal of African masculinity and resistance, employing the understanding of postcolonial theory.

4. Results and Discussion

A. Traditional African Masculine Ideals and Gender Roles

Traditional African masculine ideals and gender roles were deeply rooted in the cultural and social frameworks of many pre-colonial African societies. Generally, masculinity was associated with strength, leadership, and the ability to provide for and protect one's family. Morrell, Jewkes & Lindegger (2012) add that men were expected to take on roles such as warriors, hunters, and leaders, contributing to their communities through acts of bravery and responsibility. These ideals were often reflected in social structures and rituals that reinforced the importance of male authority and honor within the community.

Gender roles were typically well-defined, with clear expectations for men and women (Mensah, 2023). Men were generally responsible for external affairs such as warfare, diplomacy, and economic activities, while women were more involved in domestic tasks, child-rearing, and maintaining family life. This division of labor was not just about practical needs but was also embedded in the belief systems that valued different contributions of each gender. Men's roles also included performing significant cultural and spiritual duties that underscored their status and importance in society.

However, Hountondji (1996) argues that colonial rule brought significant changes to these traditional roles and ideals. European colonizers often imposed their own cultural norms and disrupted existing social structures. This interference led to shifts in gender dynamics and the redefinition of masculine roles. Men were frequently stripped of their traditional powers and responsibilities, which caused confusion and conflict within many communities. The imposition of foreign systems altered how masculinity was perceived and practiced, leading to tensions between traditional ideals and new colonial realities.

In the context of *A Grain of Wheat* and *Things Fall Apart*, the traditional African masculine ideals and gender roles are pivotal to understanding the impact of colonialism on African societies. Both texts explore how colonial rule disrupted established gender dynamics and challenged traditional notions of masculinity. The characters in these stories grapple with the erosion of their traditional roles and the imposition of foreign values, reflecting broader historical shifts. The texts illustrate the struggle of men to navigate and resist these changes, revealing the tension between preserving cultural identity and adapting to new realities imposed by colonial forces, as presented below;

1) Masculine Ideals and Gender Roles in Things Fall Apart by Chinua Achebe

Chinua Achebe's masterpiece profoundly portrays a society where masculinity is deeply tied to strength, leadership, and adherence to cultural traditions. The author artistically presents diverse masculine imaginations of the African culture. In addition, the texts highlight how each gender was assigned specific role within the community. Strict adherence was expected to be observed as per the stipulations, failure to which one would be considered as an outcast, an outcast. This consequently attracted punishment rendered by the elders. As colonial forces encroached, these traditional roles were challenged, leading to conflicts within the community and among the characters.

The association of men with strength and physical power is a central aspect of traditional masculine ideals within the Igbo society. Okonkwo, the novel's protagonist, embodies these ideals through his impressive physical prowess and achievements. His reputation as a formidable wrestler and warrior reflects the high value placed on strength and physical dominance in his community. The admiration for Okonkwo's strength is evident in his fame across the nine villages, which is built upon his personal victories and contributions to his community's honor.

"…As a young man of eighteen, Okwonko had brought honor to his village by throwing Amalinze the Cat. Amalinze was the great wrestler who for seven years was unbeaten, from Umuofia to Mbaino…"

At just eighteen, Okonkwo's victory over such a celebrated opponent brought significant honor to his village and established him as a respected figure. This early achievement not only highlights his physical strength but also underscores how strength and boldness in men were heavily revered in Igbo society. Success in wrestling and other displays of power were

crucial for gaining respect and social status, reflecting the community's deep admiration for masculine qualities of courage and physical dominance. Okonkwo's prowess in these arenas thus becomes a vital marker of his masculinity and societal value. His achievements exemplify how traditional roles and expectations shaped the understanding of what it meant to be a man in Igbo culture, where physical strength and bravery were held in the highest esteem.

Masculinity is closely tied to traits like aggressiveness and the fear of appearing weak. Okonkwo embodies these ideals as he strives to be the opposite of his father, who was seen as weak and unsuccessful. This fear of being perceived as weak drives Okonkwo's behavior throughout the story. He believes that any sign of gentleness or failure reflects poorly on his masculinity, which leads him to adopt an aggressive and harsh demeanor. His fear of failure becomes a powerful motivator, pushing him to prove his strength and resilience at every opportunity.

"...But his whole life was dominated by fear, the fear of failure and of weakness. It was deeper and more intimate than the fear of evil and capricious...Okonkwo was ruled by one passion—to hate gentleness and another was idleness..."

This excerpt highlights how Okonkwo's fear of being perceived as weak drives him to despise qualities like gentleness and inactivity, which he associates with his father's perceived failures. His aggressive actions and disdain for weakness become a means of asserting his masculinity and distancing himself from his father's legacy. This portrayal of masculinity underscores the societal pressure on men to conform to a tough, aggressive ideal. Okonkwo's relentless pursuit of strength and his rejection of any behavior he sees as weak reflect the broader cultural expectations of masculinity within the Igbo society. Achebe uses Okonkwo's character to explore how these ideals shape individuals' actions and relationships, illustrating the destructive effects of rigid gender roles and the personal conflicts they can create.

Okwonko's fear of being belittled as weak and womanly is also exhibited, when a young man once called him *acjbala*, which means a woman, and in this context a man who possessed no title.

"...he had suffered when a playmate had told him that his father was acjbala..."

In many traditional African societies, a man's fear of being called "womanly" due to weakness is deeply rooted in cultural views on gender. In these societies, masculinity is linked to strength and dominance, while femininity is seen as weak and passive. This creates strong pressure for men to act aggressively and assertively to avoid being seen as weak or less masculine as seen in Okwonkos's reaction. Postcolonial theory sheds light on this fear by showing how colonial influences made existing gender roles even more rigid. Scholars like Mohanty (2003) argue that colonial rule reinforced these traditional gender norms, adding to the pressure men face to fit into these roles. This background makes it even more challenging for men to deal with the expectations of both traditional and colonial influences on their identities.

In addition, masculinity is closely linked to a man's control over his family, especially his wives and children. Okwonko asserts dominance within his household as a way to prove his masculinity. Traditional gender roles in the Igbo society dictate that men should be the authority figures, ruling their families with firm hands. Okonkwo's strictness is demonstrated through his harsh treatment of his wives and children, showing that dominance and control are seen as essential qualities of a masculine man. The illustration where Okonkwo beats his second wife for cutting a few leaves off a banana tree reflects this rigid belief.

"...Okonkwo ruled his household with a heavy hand. His wives, especially the youngest, lived in perpetual fear of his licry temper, and so did his little children...Without further argument Okonkwo gave her a sound beating and left her and her only daughter weeping..."

The act of beating her without hearing her explanation reveals how Okonkwo uses physical violence to assert control, a common practice in traditional patriarchal structures. His need to demonstrate power through such acts stems from the societal expectation that men must be dominant to maintain order and respect in the household. This incident also reflects how fear is used as a tool to reinforce his authority, making his wives and children submissive to his will.

Achebe uses Okonkwo's actions to reveal the negative side of traditional masculine ideals, where control over others often leads to cruelty and emotional disconnection. Through a postcolonial lens, Okonkwo's harsh treatment of his family can be seen as a response to the pressures of maintaining his traditional role in a rapidly changing society. The fear he instills in his household reflects both his personal insecurities and the broader impact of colonialism, which disrupts traditional values and intensifies the need for control. Achebe critiques this form of masculinity by showing how it creates broken relationships and emotional suffering, not only for those being controlled but also for the one enforcing the control.

Men are expected to be warriors, defending their tribe from threats and upholding their community's strength and honor. Okonkwo, the novel's protagonist, epitomizes this expectation through his deep involvement in warfare and conflicts. His identity and reputation are strongly tied to his ability to fight and protect, as this is a core aspect of what it means to be a man in his society. Through Okonkwo's actions and mindset, Achebe demonstrates the importance placed on these traditional masculine roles within the Igbo community.

"...So Nwoye and Ikemefuna would listen to Okonkwo's stories about tribal wars, or how, years ago, he had stalked his victim, overpowered him and obtained his first human head..."

The illustration from the text, where Okonkwo tells stories about tribal wars and his experience in obtaining his first human head, highlights how deeply ingrained these ideals are in Umuofia. The act of taking a human head in battle is a symbol of bravery and warriorhood, which elevates a man's status in the community. Okonkwo's pride in sharing these stories with his son Nwoye and Ikemefuna reveals his belief that these acts of warfare are vital in shaping them into strong men. This emphasis on warfare as a measure of masculinity reinforces the community's expectation that men must be protectors and warriors to maintain their honor and fulfill their roles.

However, Achebe also subtly critiques these rigid expectations through Okonkwo's character. Okonkwo's obsessive adherence to the ideals of masculinity, particularly through violence and warfare, ultimately leads to his downfall. His constant need to prove his strength isolates him emotionally from his family and community. This reflects the tension between traditional masculine roles and the evolving realities faced by the Igbo society as colonial forces begin to challenge and change these norms.

Men were are closely linked to economic success and the ability to provide for one's family, as seen through the character of Okonkwo. Men were expected to be the breadwinners, and wealth accumulation was a significant marker of masculine identity. Okonkwo best represents this by becoming a successful farmer, particularly in the cultivation of yams, which were considered the "king of crops" and a symbol of male prowess. His success not only provides for his immediate family but also elevates his status within the community. This reflects the societal expectation that men should be able to sustain their families, particularly in a polygamous setting where multiple wives and children required substantial resources.

"…Okonkwo was also fending for his father's house. It was like pouring grains of corn into a bag full of holes… Yam, the king of crops, was a man's crop…"

This excerpt highlights that Okonkwo was "fending for his father's house," which symbolizes his role as a responsible and hardworking man who upholds traditional masculine ideals. The contrast between men's crops, like yams, and women's crops, such as coco-yams, beans, and cassava, emphasizes the gendered division of labor. Yams are not just a food source; they represent a man's ability to succeed and be respected in the community. Men who failed to achieve this were often looked down upon, as their inability to provide was seen as a failure of their masculinity.

Moreover, the pressures on men to be providers were intensified by the polygamous tradition in the Igbo society, where having multiple wives and children was a sign of wealth and power. This required men like Okonkwo to work relentlessly to maintain their status and care for their large families. Achebe uses Okonkwo's success in farming to reflect the broader societal expectations placed on men, where economic success was inseparable from masculine identity.

Decision-making power is firmly rooted in patriarchal authority, where men are the central figures in making crucial decisions for both their families and the community. The novel demonstrates that men hold the highest positions of authority in Igbo society, and their decisions are final. This power structure reinforces the idea that leadership and governance are male responsibilities, and women's roles are secondary in the public sphere.

"…The elders, or ndichie, met to hear a report of Okonkwo's mission. At the end they decided, as everybody knew they would, that the girl should go to Ogbuefi Udo to replace his murdered wife…"

The elders, referred to as the *ndichie*, serve as the council that deliberates on important matters, further emphasizing the dominant role of men in the decision-making processes of the society. The excerpt from the novel, where the elders decide to send a girl to Ogbuefi Udo as a replacement for his murdered wife, illustrates how men control significant decisions affecting the community. The outcome of this meeting is predictable, as it is known that the men will determine the fate of the girl. This decision reflects the collective authority of the male elders and reinforces the patriarchal structure, where men's decisions carry the weight of law and tradition. The absence of women in this deliberation highlights the gender divide and the exclusion of women from formal decision-making roles. Achebe's work underscores the broader impact of colonialism on African societies. The novel illustrates how colonial rule not only threatened the political and economic structures of the Igbo community but also disrupted the deeply ingrained gender roles that defined the social order.

Before colonialism, men were typically seen as the central figures in leadership, decision-making, and governance, while women were often relegated to domestic roles. This agrees with Jaiyeola (2020) assertion which states that structure was reinforced by cultural practices, rituals, and social expectations that placed men in positions of authority. Even after the end of colonial rule, these patriarchal norms continued to persist, though they were often reshaped by the changes brought about during the colonial era. Postcolonial theory helps to analyze how these power dynamics remained resilient, adapting to new political and social realities while still reflecting deep-seated traditional values.

In Igbo culture, a man's honor is closely linked to his reputation, achievements, and boldness, as seen in the character of Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart*. Okonkwo's obsession with his public image reflects the immense pressure to live up to the traditional masculine ideals of strength and bravery. His actions and decisions are driven by the desire to be seen as a powerful and successful man, in contrast to his father, who was regarded as weak and unsuccessful. The Igbo society places great value on a man's ability to assert himself and gain respect through his deeds, making honor a crucial aspect of male identity.

Achebe illustrates this through Okonkwo's characterization as a "man of action, a man of war" who "could stand the look of blood," unlike his father. This description highlights Okonkwo's determination to embody the masculine ideals of courage and toughness. His unwillingness to show any sign of weakness is tied to his fear of being perceived as less of a man. This fear drives him to make harsh decisions, including violent actions, to protect his reputation. Okonkwo's obsession with his image reflects the broader societal expectation that a man's worth is measured by his boldness and achievements, especially in warfare and conflict.

However, Okonkwo's fixation on upholding these masculine ideals also reveals the limitations and consequences of such pressures. His relentless pursuit of honor leads him to extreme actions, often alienating him from his community and family. Achebe uses Okonkwo's story to show how the rigid expectations of masculinity can trap men in a cycle of aggression and fear of failure.

2) Masculine Ideals and Gender Roles in A Grain of Wheat

In traditional African societies, masculinity has often been linked with the roles of leadership and warriors. These roles are deeply rooted in cultural expectations where men are seen as protectors and leaders of their communities. This traditional ideal emphasizes strength, bravery, and the responsibility of safeguarding the welfare of others. In *A Grain of Wheat* by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Kihika's role as a leader in the Mau Mau rebellion aligns with the cultural expectation of men as protectors and warriors. This ideal reflects the broader socio-cultural context of post-colonial Kenya, where traditional roles and expectations of masculinity continue to influence perceptions of leadership and heroism.

The line, "Kihika had only one aim: Uhuru for Kenya. That was his goal, that was his life," encapsulates his dedication to the cause of independence and his embodiment of the warrior role. His single-minded focus on achieving freedom for Kenya demonstrates the depth of his commitment and his alignment with the heroic ideals of masculinity. Through Kihika, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o portrays a figure who not only leads but also sacrifices himself for the greater good, reflecting the traditional view of men as those who must protect and fight for their community's survival and liberty.

The ideal of the warrior-leader is challenged and reaffirmed in the context of post-colonial struggle. While Kihika's actions align with traditional ideals of masculinity, they also highlight the tensions between cultural expectations and the realities of the struggle for independence. In a post-colonial context, the valorization of such masculine roles can both reinforce traditional gender norms and serve as a means of resistance against colonial oppression. Kihika's heroism is not only a reflection of traditional masculinity but also a critique of colonial power structures, suggesting that the fight for independence involves both reaffirming traditional values and redefining them in the face of new challenges.

Traditional African masculine ideals are closely linked to the concepts of sacrifice and martyrdom. In the context of the novel, masculinity is portrayed as not only embodying strength and leadership but also as involving a willingness to make personal sacrifices for the greater good of the community. This ideal is vividly illustrated through the character of Kihika, whose actions and ultimate sacrifice become central to the narrative. Kihika's readiness to give his life for the cause of independence reflects a deep-rooted expectation that true masculinity is demonstrated through selflessness and dedication to the welfare of one's people.

"...They were proud of Kihika, a son of the village, whose fight for freedom would never be forgotten...His death was a sacrifice for the nation..."

The author highlights how Kihika's bravery and commitment to the struggle for freedom are celebrated by his community. This passage underscores the high regard in which Kihika is held, portraying his sacrifice as a defining feature of his masculinity. His actions are viewed as a testament to the ideal that true manhood involves not just physical strength but also the ability to put the needs of the community above one's own life. Through Kihika's story, Ngugi wa Thiong'o illustrates how traditional masculine ideals are intertwined with notions of martyrdom and self-sacrifice. Kihika's character embodies the cultural belief that the highest expression of masculinity is found in the willingness to make ultimate sacrifices for the benefit of the community.

Postcolonial theory critiques how colonial powers imposed new values and roles, disrupting traditional gender roles and reshaping concepts of martyrdom. Cormack (2002) argues that martyrdom often involves sacrificing oneself for a greater cause, which is closely linked to gender roles and expectations. Men, in particular, were expected to be protectors and leaders, embodying strength and bravery. This idea of martyrdom was intertwined with notions of heroism and selflessness, where male figures would often endure hardship or death to uphold communal values or resist external threats.

In the context of the novel, men are often seen as the primary decision-makers and authority figures within both the community and the family. Mugo's role in the village illustrates this traditional expectation, as he is respected and looked up to for his guidance and protection. The reverence shown to Mugo highlights how men were traditionally perceived as pivotal leaders whose choices could significantly influence the well-being of their entire community.

Harrison (2005) indicates that all the villagers respected Mugo, they looked up to him for guidance and protection. This depiction aligns with the traditional view of men as central figures in decision-making processes. Mugo's position reflects the societal norms that assigned men the responsibility of leadership and the protection of their communities. His role as a respected leader reinforces the expectation that men should provide direction and safeguard the interests of their people. Mugo's character thus embodies the traditional masculine ideal of authority and decision-making. His influence within the village is a testament to the societal values that placed significant weight on men's roles as leaders and protectors.

Ngugi wa Thiongo closely links masculine ideals to agricultural roles. Men in the novel are depicted as essential providers for their families, primarily through their work in farming. This portrayal reflects a broader societal expectation that men should be able to sustain their households by laboring on the land. The text underscores the importance of agriculture in defining masculinity, illustrating how men's ability to cultivate and harvest crops is directly tied to their roles as providers.

The depiction of men toiling in the fields, with their hands vividly illustrates the physical and emotional demands placed on them. This imagery highlights the significant role that agricultural work plays in affirming a man's identity and status within the community. By showing the men's hard work and dedication to farming, Ngugi emphasizes that their masculinity is validated through their ability to produce and manage resources crucial for their families' well-being.

Men's role of providing is deeply rooted in the African traditions. Men were expected to engage in activities such as farming, hunting, and trading to ensure that their families had access to food and resources. As Nnaemeka (2006) notes, "In African societies, masculinity has often been defined by one's

ability to contribute economically and support one's household." This expectation underscores the importance placed on men's roles in sustaining their families and reinforcing their status within the community.

The role of men as primary breadwinners is not only a matter of economic responsibility but also of social and cultural significance. Providing for one's family is linked to personal honor and societal respect, reinforcing traditional gender roles. his economic role helps solidify men's positions as leaders and decision-makers in their households and communities.

African masculine ideals are also depicted as closely tied to resistance against colonialism. The novel illustrates how the struggle against colonial powers is seen as a continuation of the traditional masculine role of protector and warrior. Men like Kihika embody the warrior spirit of their ancestors, fighting against foreign domination to defend their community. This portrayal emphasizes that resistance is not just a political or social action but an extension of the traditional masculine duty to safeguard and uphold community values and traditions.

The text highlights this connection through the characterization of men who organize themselves into groups based on their origins, such as the example from Thabai. The men from Thabai, known for their successful defense and conquest over other tribes, reflect the traditional masculine ideals of bravery and strength.

"…The men organized themselves in groups according to the ridges of origin. Thabai was famous because men from there successfully fought other groups and took away their women…"

This historical context sets a precedent for the colonial struggle, suggesting that the fight against colonialism is a continuation of their ancestral roles. The emphasis on defending the community against invaders is consistent with the traditional expectation of men to protect and lead. By portraying men like Kihika as warriors fighting for their community's freedom, the novel underscores that their actions are deeply rooted in traditional ideals. The resistance becomes a way to reclaim and reaffirm their roles as protectors, reinforcing the connection between their historical identity and their present struggle against colonial oppression.

In postcolonial theory, men as protectors are often seen through the lens of how colonialism disrupted traditional roles and identities. Men's roles as protectors, which were once integral to their cultural identity, are challenged by colonial powers that impose new structures and values (Kandiyoti, 2015). Postcolonial theory examines how these men struggle to maintain their role as defenders of their communities while confronting the changes brought by colonial rule.

5. Conclusion

The study concludes that both texts link masculinity to strength, leadership, and strict cultural traditions. Men were expected to show physical dominance and control over their households, while women were confined to domestic roles, with failure to meet these expectations resulting in social consequences. Colonial forces disrupted these roles, causing tension and identity crises as African men struggled to maintain traditional masculine identities in changing societies. Achebe's narrative highlights this conflict, showing how colonialism challenged these roles but also how the fight for independence reasserted them. Characters like Kihika and Okonkwo, who display courage, leadership, and sacrifice, strive to reclaim their roles as protectors and leaders, reflecting the enduring cultural ideals of masculinity in the postcolonial era.

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