Title of Paper

Dimaraganaism in Chinua Achebe’s Things Fall Apart: An Anatomy of Okonkwo’s Entangled Heroism

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Abstract

Chinua Achebe’s Things Fall Apart is reputed as one of the best books to have ever come from the African scene. Translated in over 58 languages in the world and recognized as one of the Africa’s 100 Best Books of the 20th century, the novel is one of the pioneering works that laid the foundation for Africa literature. Okonkwo, the hero of the novel represents a typical traditional Igbo man in all his might and valour prior to the coming of the white men. Okonkwo is one character that has attracted the attention of scholars over the years. Many have extolled him as the hero of his time, a hero destroyed by the breakage of the African cultural values as a result of the unavoidable contact between Africans and the Europeans. This paper adopts a different approach in its enquiry and anatomy of the character and personality of Okonkwo. This paper examined Okonkwo in the light of the character of Dimaragana. Dimaragana in the context he was described in the novel is a character that would not lend his knife to cut a dog-meat because it is a taboo; rather he lends his teeth for the same business. This paper examined Okonkwo vis-à-vis the character of Dimaragana. The study portrays Okonkwo as a coward who propelled himself to his own ruin. His actions portray the opposite of what he stands for and represents in his community. The paper concludes on the idea that Okonkwo was the architect of his own tragic end, and just like foolish Dimaragana, he took many decisions that brought about his end and a total anti-climax of what was intended from the personality of a true warrior one is tempted to believe he was and represent.

Keywords: Dimaraganaism, Coward, Culture, Anatomy, Heroism, Society, Irony
Introduction

Chinua Achebe is one writer that needs no introduction in Africa and beyond. He is famous for his novel *Things Fall Apart*, the novel that is reputed to have laid the foundation of African literature and equipped many African writers with the needed creative tools and set them on the proper paths towards the establishment of the much cherished and glorified African literature as we have and appreciate it today. In the novel, Chinua Achebe sets out to write a novel that touches the core of our culture and with that singular artistic gesture, he was able to prove and showcase to the white men that Africans did not hear of culture for the first time from them. Achebe was able to prove that we have a unique culture, a philosophy of great depth and we have poetry too. It is all these that we lost to colonialism and this is what we must collectively strive to regain. This he puts across in these words:

.... African people did not hear of culture for the first time from the Europeans; that their societies were not mindless but frequently had a philosophy of great depth and value and beauty. That they had poetry and above all, they had dignity. It is this dignity that many African people all but lost during the colonial period, and it is this that we must now regain. The worst thing that can happen to any people is the loss of their dignity and self-respect .... (8).

Achebe was able to prove our African culture by looking into our cultural past, selecting various elements of our culture, our heritage and tradition and manifesting them to the world. Achebe was not a selfish and romantic writer. He was not interesting in romanticizing African culture and having an ‘unreal’ sense of nostalgia for ‘one glorious past’ as a faithful artist, he had recorded the experiences of his society with all its imperfection to show that Africa and Africans, are in their journey and metamorphosis to a refined and civilized way of life just like Europe and the Europeans once experienced in their primitive past that ushered in their much glorified present. He was deeply interested in giving his African people there voices and reclaiming their pride of culture that was almost lost in the era of colonialism. It is in line with the above the Mpalive – Hangson Msiska explains about the novel *Things Fall Apart* thus:

Conceived as a response to the denigration of Africa in colonist novels such as Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1899) and Joyce Cary’s *Mister Johnson*
(1939), *Things Fall Apart* stretches the novel form to create a space for the authentic African subject and his or her world. It seeks to go beyond the colonial depiction of grunting ‘savages’ and ‘cannibals’ with no language or cultural and historical links to their physical environment and, as such, it reverses her colonial gaze in order to reveal an essential humanity that the colonial novel either deliberately aided or repressed or was incapable of articulating (1).

The language of the novel has not only intrigued critics but has also been a major factor in the emergence of the modern African novel. Because Achebe wrote in English, portrayed Igbo life from the point of view of an African man, and used the language of his people, he was able to greatly influence African novelists, who viewed him as a mentor. Achebe laid the foundation for African literature and many African writers continue to build on and expand its territories and frontiers. This is just as Linda Strong Leek further maintained about the novel:

…though Achebe's text is written in English, the language of the colonizer, it remains authentically African: "Achebe is most successful in expressing his African experience in English and still preserving its African authenticity." The actions, ethos, and characterizations in the text depict a culture in transition, with indigenous practices which may be perceived as untenable to foreigners, but which are ordinary accepted within. Even when certain members of the community seek refuge in the Christian church, it is most often because they find themselves casualties of specific cultural norms: women who have multiple births, albinos, etc...rather than those who are secure in the traditional world…(30)

*Things Fall Apart* is a milestone in African literature. It has come to be seen as the archetypal modern African novel in English, and is read in Nigeria and throughout Africa. In the views of Moslem Zolfagharkhani and Reyhaneh Sadat Shadpour:

*Things Fall Apart* as Achebe’s first novel is an influential story which helps the reader to develop a new understanding about the history, culture and place of Africa. Besides describing the life of African people before and during the colonization, this novel depicts the close relationship between the indigenous African life and nature. In this novel all of the stories which were narrated for the
children were about nature and animals. Children had a close relationship with these concepts and could understand the meaning behind the story. (Nwoye) He remembered the story she often told of the quarrel between Earth and Sky long ago…. In fact, through these African narratives children learned about their original culture and the close relationship between nature and human beings. These stories taught humanity and morality with variant symbols in nature and proved that respecting nature is the corollary of these factors… (210)

According to Stella Okoye-Ugwu:

Part of the reason Achebe wrote *Things Fall Apart* was to portray the African ideal of a harmonious relationship between humans and the natural environment. He sets to capture a serene and tranquil traditional society full of love for one another and showcasing people living peacefully with natural elements. This is seen as what encapsulates the overall effect of Achebe’s perspective on the African’s link with land, so as to make the African readers realize what it was to dwell in a harmonious relationship with the physical environment… (156).

In the opinions of Clement Okafor:

*Things Fall Apart* is not only the story of the protagonist, Okonkwo, it is also the story of an African community Umuofia. Contrast to the Hegelian ethnocentric theory of history, which posits that Africa has neither a history nor a future, the Igbo society that Achebe portrays in this novel is keenly aware of its history and the legendary of its founding fathers. It is a society in which someone at the beginning of his career can go to an elder to obtain without any collateral the resources with which to establish himself in life. Above all, it is a society that judges a man not by the size of his inheritance, but rather by his own personal accomplishments. What informs Achebe’s portrait of Umuofia is not mawkish sentimentality, since he shows that the community has its share of internal contradictions, as it is true of all human societies. These internal contradictions, as is true of all human societies explain why new laws are being made to deal with new contradictions as well as to revisit old ones. What is remarkable in the
African society portrayed in the novel is that it has achieved a great degree of stability by maintaining a balance with its centrifugal and centripetal forces…

These are only but a selection of a few critical commentaries available on Achebe and his *Things Fall Apart*. Over the years, *Things Fall Apart* has and will continue to generate critical commentaries from scholars in all generations as the novel will always be relevant not just to African readers, but foreigners in all cultures who would wish to be fully informed on the true nature of the African culture before the breakage brought about by colonialism, a breakaway that will remain indelible in the African consciousness. In all the ages, even the generations yet to come, *Things Fall Apart* will continue to remain relevant and of serious importance. One thing that will never be forgotten is that the achievement of the novel laid the foundation for many other numerous African novelists. It is quite true that because of the novel, novelists after Achebe have been able to find an eloquent and effective mode for the expression of the particular social, historical, and cultural situation of modern Africa. So many things have been written and said about Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* that a researcher will have a great difficulty selecting what to review as pertinent and what to exclude. We shall resist that temptation here and say only a few vital things as our aim in this study is not focused on the reputation of Achebe and his *Things Fall Apart* but centered on the ironical personality of Okonkwo which revealed him as a hero and a coward all in one, thereby resembling the character of Dimaragana in the novel. It is this similarity in trait and character which betrays the heroism of Okonkwo that we study in this paper.

**The Portrait of Okonkwo as the Hero in Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart***

Okonkwo is the novel's protagonist. He has three wives and eight children, and is a brave and rich Umuofian warrior and clan leader. He is the son of the gentle and lazy Unoka, a man he resents for his weaknesses. Okonkwo strives to make his way in a culture that traditionally values manliness. Okonkwo is a famous man no doubt. He is a prosperous farmer, a great warrior and wrestler, an achiever and a no nonsense man. His yam barn stood tall if not the best in the whole village of Umuofia and he is also a member of the prestigious Ozo title and the egwugwu masquerade cult. Okonkwo represents in Umuofia what a typical man of his time would give anything to become. He represents what many man would spend a whole lifetime
striving to achieve. Even as a young man, his fame has scattered like wild harmattan fire across the nine villages of Umuofia and beyond when he threw Amalinze the Cat, a man whose back never touched the ground for seven years in the arena. This is as the writer introduced him in the opening of the novel thus:

Okonkwo was well known throughout the nine villages and even beyond. His fame rested on solid personal achievements. As a young man of eighteen he had brought honour to his village by throwing Amalinze the Cat. Amalinze was the great wrestler who for seven years was unbeaten, from Umuofia to Mbaino. He was called the Cat because his back would never touch the earth. It was this man that Okonkwo threw in a fight which the old men agreed was one of the fiercest since the founder of their town engaged a spirit of the wild for seven days and seven nights... (3).

This is a great and solid achievement that in many ways conflicts with that of his father Unoka. Unoka is described as a coward, a weakling and perhaps a never-do-well. He is a coward who spends his whole day drinking and making merry. He is good at nothing except playing the flute and of course, he has a gifted skill to borrow money from people even when he obviously owed them a substantial sum earlier. He has no barn for one to envy and has nothing tangible to call his own. He hates war and farming, anything that demands manly attributes is often dreaded by Unoka, who favours only the seasons following harvest, when people make merry and music waiting for the next year’s planting season to begin. The writer described him in these words:

Unoka, for that was his father’s name, had died ten years ago. In his days he was lazy and improvident and was quite incapable of thinking about tomorrow. If any money came his way, and it seldom did, he immediately bought gourds of palm-wine called round his neighbours and made merry. He always said that whenever he saw a dead man’s mouth he saw folly of not eating what one had in one’s lifetime. Unoka was of course a debtor and he owed every neighbour some money, from a few cowries to quite substantial amounts … (3).

One would wonder how such a man as weak as Unoka had managed to beget a son as Okonkwo. The life of Okonkwo completely negates the wisdom in the proverb that if a mother goat chews the cud, the young ones learn from watching her. This Okonkwo also acknowledged in the novel
for he believed he learnt nothing from his father. He emulated nothing because there was nothing spectacular or worthy of emulation. Okonkwo single-handedly built his world. He inherited nothing from his father who died like a coward he was described to be. Unoka left only piles of debts which he couldn’t pay and may never pay had fate given him longer years. He left Okonkwo with nothing before he journeyed to the evil forest, a place that became his grave. It was an improvised grave for people with swelling stomachs considered as an abomination to the earth goddess. Such a man is not allowed to die in his house but is carried to the evil forest and left there to die. That was the fate of Unoka. As a young man, Okonkwo defeats the village's best wrestler, earning him lasting prestige. He therefore rejects everything for which he believes his father stood: Unoka was idle, poor, profligate, cowardly, gentle, lazy, and interested in music and conversation. Okonkwo consciously adopts opposite ideals and becomes productive, wealthy, brave, violent, and opposed to music and anything else that he regards as "soft," such as conversation and emotion. He is stoic to a fault. He is also the hardest-working member of his clan. Whatever Okonkwo achieved in life, he did it single handedly. At a very tender age he takes it upon himself to achieve everything his father never achieved and hate everything he likes. He wishes to avoid all his pitfalls and walk only in the light of heroism. That was why at the age of eighteen he is already a famous wrestler. In the early stages of life he is ready for great farming which will yield great harvest. He had gone to borrow yams, from Nwakibie but unlike his father, he was optimistic to pay back knowing full well that he will put the yams seedlings to good use and produce bountiful harvest. Nwakibie had described Okonkwo thus:

'It pleases me to see a young man like you these days when our youth have gone so soft. Many young men have come to ask for yams but I have refused because I know they would just dump them in the earth and leave them to be choked by weeds. When I say no to them they think I am hard-hearted. But it is not so…. I have learnt to be stingy with my yams. But I can trust you. I know it as I look at you. I shall give you twice four hundred yams. Go ahead and prepare your farm (17).

Despite the terrible rain that followed that year’s planting season and saw many farmers lose their yams that those who could not endure the loss committed suicide, Okonkwo held on. He did what he had to do and managed to save that year which he described as the worst year of his life
as a farmer. He obviously repaid the yams borrowed and built a barn people envied. He did so much that made him to go down in the annals of Umuofia as one of the great men the town had raised.

Dimaraganaism in Achebe’s Things Fall Apart: Okonkwo’s Prototype

Okonkwo is indeed a hero, the true opposite of his father which critics continue to acknowledge. He is a true son of the soil and made Umuofia proud in many ways. He was a legend and one of the greatest of his time. But suffice it to say that irrespective of all the high praises, Okonkwo was not free of blemish. He had a flaw which placed him in comparison with the character Dimaragana who did the opposite of what he intended doing. The idea of Dimaragana was borrowed from the speech of Obierika, a character in Achebe’s Things Fall Apart. Obierika mentioned this in the novel while he is discussing with Okonkwo and others present on many issues most especially as it concerns the idea of belittling the Ozo title by some neighbouring towns like Abame and Aninta. Okonkwo had earlier lamented his inability to tend and tap his palm trees, not because he is not fit but because it is against the ethics of an Ozo title holder in Umuofia. This is a situation he believes made it possible for Umezulike, the tapper, whom he believes does more harm than good to his palm trees in the name of tapping the wine. Obierika then speaks of some other title holders who do not climb palm trees to tap the wine but could tap the short ones standing on the ground. It was then that he made reference to the character of Dimaragana, who will not lend his knife for cutting up dog-meat because it is a taboo, rather would volunteer to cut it with his teeth. In his words: “it is like Dimaragana, who will not lend his knife for cutting up dog-meat because the dog was taboo to him, but offered to use his teeth. (55)

This is typical irony and sheer mockery for a man not to lend his knife to cut a dog-meat because it is a taboo, but rather will offer to use his teeth. It is obvious that in the process of cutting the meat with the teeth that both some debris of the meat, the water and other particles are bound to journey into his stomach whether knowingly or unknowingly. Such a man can no longer make solid claim not to have eaten a dog-meat having tasted it with his teeth. This is sheer stupidity and irony of what was originally intended. It is from the foolishness of Dimaragana, that we are propelled to enquire and anatomize the true character of Okonkwo who in many ways shares
similar traits with Dimaragana, not in the actual cutting of dog-meat with his teeth but in exhibiting actions that negate and mock what he thought he was preserving all his life.

Okonkwo was a brave man who lived in fears. All his life, he was never himself, he was living in fears. The fears were evident in the way he ruled his household, the way he went about his business, the way he struggled to dominate and reach the pinnacle of his desires. All were driven and motivated by inner fears he could not avoid and it was this fear that destroyed him. According to Achebe:

Okonkwo ruled his household with a heavy hand. His wives especially the youngest, lived in perpetual fear of his fiery temper, and also did his little children. Perhaps down in his heart, Okonkwo was not a cruel man. 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 gods and of magic, the fear of the forest and of the forces of nature, malevolent, red in tooth and claw. Okonkwo’s fear was greater than these. It was not external but lay deep within himself. It was the fear of himself, lest he should be found to resemble his father… (11).

A deeper look and anatomy of the actions of Okonkwo will reveal the cowardice spirit in him. He is a brave man, a warrior at the outside but a coward and full of fears in the inside. That is why he could likened to Dimaragana who never wanted to lend his knife to cut a dog-meat that was a taboo but offered to use his teeth to do it. Okonkwo was a man who would wish to be brave and manly at all times but many of his acts reveal his cowardly nature. He was not able to draw a line between heroism and cowardice. The first time he exhibited this was during the Week of Peace. He had beaten his wife during the Week of Peace. It was a week sacred and dedicated to the goddess of the earth and it was the week between harvest and the next planting season. The essence of the peace ritual was to achieve peace and placate the heart of the goddess for a bountiful harvest the coming year. People do not quarrel or say harsh things to themselves. They only eat, drink and make merry. It was during this sacred week that Okonkwo beat Ojiugo because she had neglected to give him his afternoon food. Despite the pleas of the other wives about the sacredness of the Week of Peace, Okonkwo was said to be the type of man who would not stop half-way beating somebody, not even for the fear of a goddess (24). The apparent reason
for this sheer bravery was to prove himself a warrior but every true warrior knows that a man should not fight with the gods. Every true warrior in the clan observes the Week of Peace knowing that it is only cowardly to violate it. That was why even the old men in Umuofia find it hard to recall when last a man broke the Week of Peace. It was Ezeani, the priest of Ani goddess who spelt out his atrocity thus:

‘You are not a stranger in Umuofia. You know as well as I do that our forefathers ordained that before we plant any crops in the earth we should observe a week in which a man does not say a harsh word to his neighbour. We live in peace with our fellows to honour our great goddess of the earth without whose blessings our crops will not grow…. ‘You have committed a great evil…your wife was at fault, but even if came into your obi and found her lover on top of her, you would still have committed a great evil to beat her.’ His staff came down again. ‘The evil you have done can ruin the whole clan. The earth goddess whom you have insulted may refuse to give us her increase and we shall all perish.’ His tone unchanged from anger to command. ‘You will bring to the shrine of Ani tomorrow one she-goat, one hen, a length of cloth and hundred cowries. He rose and left the hut (24).

Okonkwo may have fulfilled the punishment even more as he added an extra pot of palm-wine to his offerings which was not included in Ezeani’s request. Yet that does not mask the cowardice in him, the fear which drives him. A true warrior acts only when it is time to display bravely and not in domestic issues during a sacred week.

Another incident worthy of note is his attempt to kill his wife during the feast of the New Yam. Okonkwo had beaten Ekwefi for plucking leaves from a banana tree. He claimed that he had killed the banana and had beaten her up. In anger the wife had muttered something about his gun that never fired and the following action ensued:

Unfortunately for her, Okonkwo heard it and ran into his room for the loaded gun, ran out again and aimed at his wife as she clambered over the dwarf wall of the barn, he pressed the trigger and there was a loud report accompanied by the wail of his wives and children. He threw down the gun and jumped into the barn, and
there lay the woman, very much shaken and frightened but quite unhurt. He heaved a heavy sigh and went away with the gun (31).

From the perspective of Okonkwo, he was only being brave and perhaps with a mixture of bad-temper and anger but an analysis of the above scene will reveal that the attempt to kill his wife was uncalled for. That is not a way to demonstrate his bravery. He could have simply ignored the woman and attend to his business. We could note how he dropped his gun and rushed towards the barn afraid he had killed his wife. One can argue that he felt more relieved to notice that she escaped the attack than his wife who survived the murder attempt. They were fears in his actions and only a man who is afraid can orchestrate such demeaning domestic violence and terrorism in his household and not a true hero.

Another incident where Okonkwo demonstrated his cowardice and not bravery was in the killing of Ikemefuna. Ikemefuna was a boy entrusted under his care and for three years or more he had lived in his house and called him father. He was brought for sacrifice to placate the hearts of the gods over the death of a daughter of Umuofia in Mbaino. When the oracle decided that he would be killed, Ogbuefi Ezeudu, one of the oldest men in the community, a warrior in his prime had taken the pains to come and warn or better still plead with Okonkwo not to have any hand in killing of Ikemefuna because the boy called him Father. It is not cowardice but for humanity, a show of love and exhibition of the milk of human kindness but Okonkwo definitely led the team of warriors the next day to see to the end of the boy. The scene of the killing was captured thus:

…..as the man who had cleared his throat drew up and raised his machete, Okonkwo looked away. He heard the blow. The pot fell and broke in the sand. He heard Ikemefuna cry ‘my father, they have killed me!’ as he ran towards him. Dazed with fear, Okonkwo drew his machete and cut him down. He was afraid of being thought weak (49).

An in-depth analysis of the above episode will reveal the true nature and cowardly spirit of Okonkwo. He was full of fears, fears that ruled his life in the inside. First, he followed the men to kill Ikemefuna because he would not wish to be associated with the effeminate men who were busy chasing locusts and refused to join in executing the bizarre crime against humanity. Okonkwo should have stayed away as Ogbuefi Ezeudu had pleaded in his wisdom. But he led
the men out of fear. Secondly, he had looked away when one of the men raised his machete to kill Ikemefuna. That was an apparent sign of cowardice; a true warrior should look on. He is never afraid of such sight of bloodshed irrespective of who is being killed but Okonkwo had looked away in fear. Thirdly, when the boy was running towards him in pains, it was not the spirit of a warrior and heroism that made him kill Ikemefuna, rather Okonkwo was dazed with fear, fear was all over him, fear of being a coward which he is ironically. It is this fear that made him to draw his machete and killed Ikemefuna. Again the reason is not because he is a warrior it is because of the same fear of being thought weak, even when all his actions portray the opposite of what he intends to achieve. As if they were not enough, the fears drove him home. He did not eat nor drink. He was even afraid of staying alone that he invites his Nwoye to stay with him but the boy always sneaks away whenever he falls asleep thus:

Okonkwo did not taste any food for two days, after the death of Ikemefuna. He drank palm-wine from morning till night, and his eyes were red and fierce like the eyes of a rat when it was caught by the tall and dashed against the floor. He called his son, Nwoye, to sit with him in his Obi. But the boy was afraid of him and slipped out of the hut as soon as he noticed him dozing. He did not sleep at night. He tried not to think about Ikemefuna, but the more he tried the more he thought about him. Once he got up from bed and walked about his compound. But he was so weak that his legs could hardly carry him. He felt like a drunken giant walking with the limbs of a mosquito. Now and then a cold shiver descended on his head and spread down his body... (50)

The argument here is that all the actions he exhibited after killing Ikemefuna were not manly and heroic. If he knew he would not eat nor drink and would be afraid even to stay alone, he would not have partaken in killing Ikemefuna. A true warrior puts things behind him and move on but here we see Okonkwo inside his hut and mourning like a woman. The only thing lacking is that he is not crying out tears but obviously the tears flow in the inside. One will be tempted to understand that he is only being human but a warrior cannot be human over a boy he killed. He shouldn’t have had a hand in his killing and after he did, he should have been a man. But Okonkwo portrayed his true nature, a woman and a coward. This he laments thus:
'When did you become a shivering old woman, Okonkwo asked himself, 'you, who are known in all the nine villages for your valour in war? How can a man who has killed five men in battle fall to pieces because he has added a boy to their number? Okonkwo you have become a woman indeed … (51)'

Indeed, Okonkwo has always been a woman but it took him time to realize it, if actually he did. He is only a man in the outside but a woman in the inside. He is a warrior in the outside and a coward in the inside and what is inside is always greater to judge the life and personality of a man. Okonkwo had gone to see his friend, Obierika. It was Obierika who took time to school and counsel him in the ways of a true warrior and hero. Okonkwo had tried to condemn his friend for falling to join the delegation that killed Ikemefuna which he saw as a sign of cowardice in his friend. He thought that his friend was afraid of blood but Obierika had counseled him in these words:

‘You know very well, Okonkwo that I am not afraid of blood; and if anyone tells you that I am, he is telling a lie. And let me tell you one thing, my friend. If I were you I would have stayed at home. What you have done will not please the earth. It is the kind of action for which the goddess wiped out whole families….’ ‘The earth cannot punish me for obeying her messenger,’ Okonkwo said. ‘A child’s fingers are not scalded by a piece of hot yam which its mother puts into its palm. ‘That is true,’ Obierika agreed. ‘But if the Oracle said that my son should be killed I would neither dispute it nor be the one to do it… (53).

From the viewpoint of Obierika, we see true heroism and gallantry. We see a warrior who still plays by the rule. We see a man who could draw a line between true heroism and mere cowardice act. He separated the task of a warrior from the ever arising domestic squabbles which Okonkwo hardly escape. He was the opposite of Obierika. He does not draw any line between heroism and sheer cowardice. Obierika understands the importance of the fact that one does not see a masquerade standing at one place. He knows that the world is a masquerade and for one to see it well, one must not be rooted in a fixed position. But all these were not in the philosophy of Okonkwo. Perhaps in accident or a punishment from the gods, however way, he shoots the son of Ogbuefi Ezeudu during his burial and the punishment is exile. It was while he was in exile that the white men settled in Umuofia and have won their way into the hearts of many. Okonkwo
on returning back to Umuofia realized the level of harm the white men religion has done to his clan just like in Mbanta where he exiled himself. It was in Mbanta that he lost his son, Nwoye, to the white men’s religion. Nwoye saw in that religion, an escape and inner healing from the personality his father have always wanted to impose on him. Nwoye, before joining the white men’s religion lived a dual life. He lived to please his father by staying with him in his obi and listen to his tales of violence, war and brutality while his heart is with his mother in her hut and the folktales about the tortoise she tells him. That was where his heart truly belongs. He has no drive for sheer heroism as his father had always wanted. It is not surprising that he left his father and joined the new religion aware that he will never come back to him. When Okonkwo came back to Umuofia, he wished to continue his warrior-like nature. Even when Obierika counseled caution, Okonkwo would not listen. The final tragedy occurred when he killed a messenger of the white man. Following the killing of one of the messengers, Okonkwo again betrayed his true nature. He was aware that Umuofia would not fight but he acted like a coward. A true warrior would have stayed and face the worst but Okonkwo perhaps as a result of fear or cowardice took his life. He hanged himself before the white men could reach him. He was finally thrown into the evil forest where he will rot like his father, Unoka and others who have been thrown into the evil forest. His end became an anti-climax of his life and pointed to the direction that he has always been a coward and little wonder he ended his lifetime of gallantry as a coward in the evil forest.

Conclusion

What this paper has done is to take another look at the character of Okonkwo who many had heaped with bravery, heroism and gallantry in contrast to that of the weakling of his father Unoka. A close dissection of Okonkwo’s lives, actions and inactions reveals him a coward. Okonkwo never lived a normal life; he was driven by fear, an inner fear of being a coward like his father, a fear that was greater than that of any other thing on earth. This fear propelled him and as his life unfolds we realize that he was only wearing a mask. Okonkwo's life is dominated by fear of failure and of weakness—the fear that he will resemble his father. Ironically, in all his efforts not to end up like his father, he commits suicide, becomes in his culture an abomination to the Earth and is rebuked by the tribe as his father was (Unoka died from swelling and was likewise considered an abomination). Okonkwo's suicide represents not only his culture's rejection of him, but his rejection of the changes in his people's culture, as he realizes that the
society that he so valued has been forever altered by the Christian missionaries. Okonkwo may be a man in the outside but he is a woman in the inside. He is full of fears and it is this fear that he covers in the guise of manly actions. He executed many actions not worthy of a warrior, these ranging from his domestic violence and terrorism on his family to his miscalculated judgments. Obierika stands the portrait of a better warrior who understands change and plays with the rule of life. But that does not take away the hardworking and productive nature of Okonkwo, his wrestling feats, farming exploits, and fatherly role. But the truth is that the case of Okonkwo is quite the case of Dimaragana who would not lend his knife to cut dog meat because it was a taboo but volunteered to use his teeth. Some critics may want to blame the white men for the fate of Okonkwo from which perspective Okonkwo will be free of criticism and condemnation. The argument will be that if the white men had not located the African jungle and usurped the peace and harmony in a once peaceful community, Okonkwo would have had no reason to take his life and would have lived. The white men struck on the cord that held the people together and they fell apart. Okonkwo did not only fall apart, he took his own life and perished. In as much as we consider this line of argument but it is necessary to project strongly and exonerate the white men from the tragedy of Okonkwo. He was the one who drove himself to a suicidal end. While other men were accepting the realities of a new way of life they have no control over, which is the way life ought to be, Okonkwo was bent on proving himself a hero, and a warrior. His inability to accept change and relinquish his fears brought about his tragic end. The white colonizers in main ways do not share blame in the tragedy of Okonkwo for just as Linda Strong Leek opines, “Achebe's main character, Okonkwo emerges early in the text as a traditional hero, who has within himself the ability to languish or attain his goals. Achebe's readers understand that European colonialists do not precipitate Okonkwo's ultimate downfall. Instead, it is Okonkwo's seeds of self-destruction, which are deeply concealed in his desire to be the antitheses of his "feminine" father. (29) The Europeans are not to be blamed for his downfall and tragic end, rather his feminine instincts, his inner fears and dimaranganaistic nature brought about his ruin.

In the views of Clement Okafor:

From the perspective of Igbo Cosmology, Okonkwo’s inability to recognize the duality and complexity of life situations is a major handicap, since it reveals a fundamental lack of balance in his life. Okonkwo’s problems also emanate from his inability to practice another Igbo ideal, balance in one’s assessment of
situations since he usually take extremist position in life. For instance, he cannot understand how a strong man like Ogbuefi Ndulue can do nothing without consulting his wife first. Again, to Okonkwo, the new colonial dispensation is an unmitigated evil that should be expunged from his home and he does not realize that many of his people view it differently. (72)

The life of Okonkwo was an anti-climax as he embraced the same fate he was running away from. He ended up dying like a coward which he was always afraid of and just like his father Unoka, he final resting place was the evil forest. Obviously, both men are going to have a long talk on how their different boats that took different routes ended in the same destination, the evil forest where only cowards and never-do-wells are left to rot on the sand.
Works Cited


