

## From Fame to Shame: The Irreconcilable Worlds of Okonkwo

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**Abstract:** Okonkwo is a man of fame, wildly acclaimed in Umuofia as a man of valour. He at the same time has a notoriety for violence. With a nagging fear of failure, he overreaches himself most often to counter the notion of his not being a woman. This inner desire for manliness plunges him into avoidable acts of shame and wrong decisions. Okonkwo lives in two worlds of fame and shame. He is caught in the crossroad of valour and overzealousness. On the contrary, Okonkwo is reputed for violence. His anger and shot temperedness portray his ugly side which is very well known among Umuofia. His superfluous show of power forces him into exile after he accidentally shoots Ezeudu's son during Ezeudu's funeral rites and consequently he embarks on a forced exile. His killing of the white man's messenger saw his final disgrace and eventual death. Using the concepts of fame and shame, this paper examines the two worlds of the protagonist, the world of gallantry and fame and the world of shame and eventual suicide. The essay specifically observes the distinct features of the two worlds Okonkwo lived in. However, his inability to embrace the change as brought by the white missionary, and his inability to reconcile the old and trending dispensation become his undoing. Okonkwo is therefore propelled by his character which makes him to exist in the two worlds.

**Keywords:** Fame, Shame, Power, Gallantry, Irreconcilable.

### INTRODUCTION

Achebe's Okonkwo lives in two worlds: the world of fame and world of shame. His life being eventful, witnessed the wee years of youthful gallantry, power and recognition. As the text captures it "Okonkwo was well known throughout the nine villages and even beyond" (*Things Fall Apart* 3). As a famous man, he epitomizes the traditional Umuofia wealthy man: having three barns, having taken the highest title in the community, showing power as an acclaimed wrestler who defeated the untouchable Amalinze even at a young age. He maintains power over his household and commands respect in Umuofia. "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" (3). And so Okonkwo becomes famous, a fame greatly recognized in his community and surrounding communities on account of personal effort. The *Oxford Lexicon Dictionary*, defines fame as "the state of being known or talked about by many people, especially on account of notable achievements". Okonkwo has lots of personal achievements, mostly acquired by dint of hard work. His greatest fear is failure. He is paranoid about the laziness and thus failure of his father Unoka that he goes to the extreme to distance himself or be associated with any failure in any circumstance.

According to A.N. Akwanya and Virgy A. Anohu in the *50 years of Nigerian Novel*, "Okonkwo is likened to Nietzsche's Superman and Sophocle's "more than man". But Okonkwo is more of Sophocle's character who is properly a hero" (44). Okonkwo is a hero and superman according to these stipulations. He enjoys the fame due to him but not without hitches. As the article "The School of Life" points out that "psychologically, the famous are of course the very last people on earth to be well equipped to deal with what they are going through. After all, they only became famous because they were wounded, because they had thick skin" (Online). Okonkwo has his faults. His short temperedness puts him out to violent actions. This eventually makes him vulnerable to criticism and judgment. His unguarded actions result to shame which *The Oxford Dictionary on Lexicon* defines as "a painful feeling of humiliation or distress caused by the consciousness of wrong or foolish behaviour" (Online). This shame is followed by stigma. It is very obvious that most of the actions of Okonkwo that add to his negative side are avoidable, overzealous and superfluous and therefore can be considered foolish. Frances Campbell in *Perspectives in Psychiatric Care* describes shame as "the pain of feeling unloved and vulnerable, and shame anxiety is contended to occur when the wishes for love and power are thwarted and there exists only a traumatic helplessness about ever

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attaining such a love and power” (62). Okonkwo lacks the power to achieve the desire of restoring Umuofia’s tradition already desecrated by the white man’s religion and thus falls to shame.

Neda Sedighimornani defines shame “as a complex emotion and often incapacitating and unbearable”. She posits that shame dissolves the urge to continue and keeps one helpless. Going further to describe the psychological effect of shame, Gregg Henriques states that “shame is one of the most painful emotions that we humans can experience. It is probably one of the most avoided, inhibited or defended against feeling states” (Online). The emotion of shame as a result of fear of failure is the major underlying motivation behind Okonkwo’s ordeal. Unfortunately, his hyperactive attitude leads him deeper into unpalatable outcomes. All the situations that have seen Okonkwo fallen are situations of self ego. So as Neda writes “older psychoanalytic approaches argued that shame arises when there is a conflict between the ego (the identity that resembles the real self) and the ego-ideal (the perfect and ideal images to which one aspires)” (81). Okonkwo has the problem of the ego and so his personality is surrounded by conflict. “Many people have reported feeling shame over failing to achieve what they expected because they were disabled or different or defective, or being unable to manage what “normal” people manage” (Gregg Henriques). Shame is a human emotion, inherent alongside other emotions. Fame exists also in connection to other emotions. “Emotions such as shame, pride, guilt, embarrassment, envy, empathy, and jealousy are associated with a sense of self-awareness, hence, they belong to a family of self-conscious emotions” (Neda 72). These emotions of fame and shame go hand in hand with stigma. The *Oxford Dictionary* defines stigma as “a mark of disgrace associated with a particular circumstance, quality or person” (Online). Okonkwo witnessed the worlds of fame, shame and stigma.

*Things Fall Apart* has recorded wide critical analysis with scholarly researches on diverse aspects of the text, such that it keeps opening more spaces for discussion. Casmir Komenan describes Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* as “A Seminal Novel in Africa”, says the text as a “Seminal” novel is creative and original, valued as excellent and influential since it contains the seeds, beginnings of upcoming involvement. He opines that a seminal novel is “a classic [...] a book that has never finished what it wants to say” (56). *Things Fall Apart* remains inexhaustible in critical space. Researchers have also reviewed the text from the perspectives of cultural values, ethics and socio-political paradigm. Thomas-Michael Emeka Chukwuezie in “Cultural Imperatives and the Dynamics of an Effectual Society: A Reading of Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*” highlights “the cultural fabrics of the fictive world of the novel in order to portray a putatively

vibrant and self-sufficient society, a society that her cultural practices sustained her institutions before her contact with the Europeans” (Akwanya and Okoro 11). The emphasis here is on Umuofia community as a society imbued with such qualities as industry, resilience, justice, kingship and friendship. These rich cultural qualities help to maintain fairness and harmony in Umuofia and are sufficient to keep its people intact. Chukwuezie concludes that “the cultural practices of Umuofia society empower and sustain it. Some of these qualities embedded in their culture serve as rules that shape both an individual and the social consciousness” The study advocates a meticulous re-evaluation of our cultural heritage in order to tap into its potentials so as to re-jig and reinvigorate our “ailing society” (Akwanya and Okoro 2). This confirms the fact that African cultural values have existed and are capable of maintaining peace and harmony among its people.

Chukwuma Onyebuchi Okeke and Chinedu Chidiebere Ezebube study Okonkwo as a man of the family, *dibuno* in Igbo cosmology in the essay, “Conception of *Dibuno* in Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*” The essay examines the concept of *dibuno* in Igbo pre-colonial, colonial and contemporary times using Okonkwo as a case study, and by adopting the phenomenological research approach, the paper examines how *dibuno* is conceptualized in the novel, and how such conceptualizations are related to the contemporary Igbo fathers” ( Akwanya and Okoro 100). It is a comparative essay on the traditional and modern day fathers, in their level of responsibility and commitment as fathers in Igbo traditional perspective. While he observes that traditional *dibuno* is more autocratic in the discharge of their duties, using Okonkwo as an example says that “Okonkwo’s attitude to his family members makes them to remain in fear of him” (119). The Contemporary *dibuno* “is more interactive with his family” (119) and still maintains some of Okonkwo’s *dibuno* styles as exemplified in the novel” (119). Chukwuma concludes that “the traditional *dibuno* is feared while the contemporary *dibuno* is respected even though they only earn such respect if they live up to their responsibilities” (120). This submission suggests that Okonkwo is a role model for the African *dibuno*.

A psychoanalytic study of *Things Fall Apart*, by Genevieve Ifeyinwa Okonkwo in “Sexualizing Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*” looks at the hidden identities of both the protagonist Okonkwo and the community Umuofia. The writer presents Okonkwo and Umuofia community as sexualized in their actions, stating that “Achebe wants to call attention to his deployment of sexuality in telling sub-stories in the text: Achebe presents a protagonist who is destroyed by his uncontrollable sexual drive and not just his inability to cope with the incursion of westernization into Umuofia” (Okike 124). His drive is identified as fear as the writer concludes that Okonkwo’s tragedy is his

desire for what he detests – woman. This when extended becomes “fear”. This internal conflict destroys him ...” (134 Okike). Thus, his final end becomes regrettable for not being able to reconcile the inert emotion of fear.

Scholars have explored and keep exploring interdisciplinary aspects of study of the text. For example, J. Fredrick Allen had studied “Man and Nature: An Ecocritical Analysis of Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*”. This examines the ecocritical method of analyzing literary texts” (50). However, in spite of the vast critical exploits of scholars on the novel, there is still a gap to fill which gives vent to the paper, “From Fame To Shame: The Irreconcilable Worlds Of Okonkwo”. The paper explores the concepts of fame and shame to examine the gap and relationship between Okonkwo’s successes and failures. The essay makes a textual analysis to identify and highlight the failure of Okonkwo’s popularity and eventual stigma of shame.

### Okonkwo’s Worlds of Fame

Okonkwo is a man of many positive characters and fortune. He is a man of fame who characteristically possesses and exhibits heroic and brave virtues. All these by dint of hardwork, as Achebe affirms that “but it was really not true that Okonkwo’s palm-kernels had been cracked for him by a benevolent spirit. He had cracked them himself. Anyone who knew his grim struggle against poverty and misfortune could not say he had been lucky” (*Things Fall Apart* 21). Okonkwo basically gains great respect and popularity through his personal efforts. Umuofia reveres him as a great man, warrior, lord and respected elder who enjoys the blessing and affirmation of his personal god. His success is placed in line with the Igbo proverb that ‘when a man say yes, his *chi* says yes also, Okonkwo said yes very strongly, so his *chi* agreed” (21). This is however because Okonkwo makes a conscious decision to be successful against his inherited poor background. Okonkwo presents a strong Igbo spirit and belief in hard work for self- achievements. Accordingly, Marcel Onyibor mutes that ‘the Igbo concept of *chi* is not an ordinary abstract concept but a living reality in everyday life and experience of the individual in the community. It is an operative principle that has far reaching effect on individual psyche and self-actualization’ (546). It is believed that Okonkwo is poised for greatness and he is set out to reach the peak of fame and acceptance in Umuofia. And so Okonkwo’s fame grows consistently with his personal achievements.

It is written that “Okonkwo was clearly cut out for great things. He was still young but he had won fame as the greatest wrestler in the nine villages. He was a wealthy farmer and had two barns full of yams, and had just married his third wife. To crown it all he had taken two titles and had shown incredible prowess

in two inter-tribal wars” (7). Okonkwo manifests his decision for greatness early in life. Thus, he decides to engage Amalinze in a wrestling match at a very young age of eighteen. “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...”(3). Komena observes that “Okonkwo is depicted a great wrestler who defeated Amalinze the Cat. With his physical quality, Okonkwo also proves that he is a great farmer. He owns three barns full of yams with which he could feed his family from one harvest to another” (57). The popularity he gains through physical strength, hard work and industry showcase him as very reliable and trustworthy. He is dependable as a young man.

Okonkwo’s hardwork earns him credibility and trust of the elders, and as the elders say, Okonkwo had clearly washed his hands and so he ate with the kings and elders. And that was how he came to look after the doomed lad Ikemefuna” (7)... The elders, or *ndichie*, met to hear a report of Okonkwo’s mission. At the end they decided, as everybody knew they would, As for the boy, he belonged to the clan as a whole, and there was no hurry to decide his fate. Okonkwo was, therefore, asked on behalf of the clan to look after him in the interim. And so for three years Ikemefuna lived in Okonkwo’s household” (*Things Fall Apart* 10-11).

This is a testament to Okonkwo’s good standing in his clan and among the people. Chinyere Nwahunanya writes that “Ikemefuna is the young lad from Mbaino who, with a young virgin, is given to Umuofia in reparation for the murder of a daughter of Umuofia. He is kept in Okonkwo’s custody for three years, during which period he virtually becomes a member of Okonkwo’s household, calling Okonkwo “father” (319). Okonkwo enjoys the rare privilege and goodwill of the elders of Umuofia who unanimously entrust Ikemefuna in his care.

Okonkwo’s plea to Nwakibie for yam seedlings to plant receives instant acceptance and honour. Okonkwo states clearly his case, saying, “I have cleared a farm but have no yams to sow. I know what it is to ask a man to trust another with his yams, especially these days when young men are afraid of hardwork. I am not afraid of work” (*Things Fall Apart* 17). Nwakaibie affirms Okonkwo’s ingeniousness. He tells him, “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 me to ask for yams but I have refused because I knew they would just dump them in the earth and leave them to be choked by weed” (17). Okonkwo’s diligence at work earns him the respect and trust of the elders in Umuofia and paves way for his popularity.

Presenting Okonkwo as a role model for younger generation, Chukwumezie states that “Okonkwo who stands for the younger generation of Umuofia at the beginning of the narrative demonstrated this spirit of industry which eventually distinguished him in the entire Umuofia” (14). Okonkwo is respectful and humble according to cultural expectation. This why he is accepted by the elders. He pays homage to elders and receives their blessings. Okonkwo visited Nwakibie with a pot of wine and a cock as he tells him, “*Nna anyi*, I have brought you this little kola. As our people say, a man who pays respect to the great paves the way for his own greatness. I have come to pay you my respects and also to ask a favour” (15). Showing respect to elders is one of the traditional values most appreciated. Okonkwo maintains this culture and in return reaps the fruits of respect and honour in his community and even beyond. He becomes an epitome of cultural resilience, working all round the clock to take care of his manly responsibilities. “During the planting season Okonkwo worked daily on his farms from cock-crow until the chickens went to roost. He was a very strong man and rarely felt fatigue” (11). He is able to fend for his family as he maintains his fatherly role:

He had a large compound enclosed by a thick wall of red earth. His own hut or obi, stood immediately behind the only gate in the red walls. Each of the three wives had her own hut, which together formed a half moon behind the obi. The barn was built against one end of the red walls, and long stacks of yam stood out prosperously in it. At the opposite end of the compound was a shed for the goats, and each wife built a small attachment to her hut for the hens. Near the barn was a small house, the ‘medicine house’ or shrine where Okonkwo kept the wooden symbols of his personal god and of his ancestral spirits. He worshipped them with sacrifices of kola nut, food and palm wine, and offered prayers to them on behalf of himself, his three wives and eight children (*Things Fall Apart* 12).

Even during his days in exile, Okonkwo maintains his characteristic sense of responsibility and strength of mind. His presence in a foreign land does not deter his desire of being a resourceful man. Thus, “Okonkwo and his family worked very hard to plant a new farm” (104). Okonkwo is rated as a rich and wealthy man, his prosperity was visible in his household. These are the marks of a man of honour, dignity and wealth in Umuofia. Okonkwo maintains the standard of a titled man and belongs to the class of men to reckon with in Umuofia and even beyond.

Okonkwo is a man of fine built and personality. He is handsomely endowned. Achebe describes him “as tall and huge, and his bushy eyebrows and wide nose gave him a very severe look. He breathed heavily, and it was said that, when he slept, his wives and children in their out-houses could hear him breathe. When he walks, his heels hardly touched the

ground and he seemed to walk on springs, as if he was going to pounce on somebody” (3). His physical features endear him to the admiration of the women. Hence, one of his wives Ekwefi, is reported to have left her husband to run to him. “Many years ago when she was the village beauty Okonkwo had won her heart by throwing the Cat in the greatest contest within living memory. She did not marry him then because he was too poor to pay her bride price. But a few years later she ran away from her husband and came to live with Okonkwo” (*Things Fall Apart* 32). Okonkwo greatly enjoys respect, fame and popularity through self-achievement and resourcefulness. He relishes the trust of the community as a courageous, vibrant and strong man who is reliable and available.

His fine built is attached to his valour and physical strength. This is because “Okonkwo is not afraid of war. He was a man of action, a man of war. Unlike his father he could stand the look of blood. In Umuofia’s latest war he was the first to bring home a human head. That was his fifth head. On great occasions such as the funeral of a village celebrity he drank palm wine from his first human head” (8-9). It is his fearlessness at wars that merited him the trust to lead a despatch of warriors to Mbaino demanding for war or compensation for killing a daughter of Umuofia, and wife of Ogbuefi Udo. And so when Okonkwo of Umuofia arrived at Mbaino as the proud and imperious emissary of war, he was treated with great honour and respect...” (*Things Fall Apart* 10). This confirms the truth of the popularity of Okonkwo that extends beyond Umuofia.

### **Okonkwo’s World of Shame**

Okonkwo has a hidden passion. “his whole life was dominated by fear, the fear of failure and of weakness” (*Things Fall Apart* 11). The fear of failure and perception of being found or adjudged weak places Okonkwo at trigger ready to avoidable violent actions. Okonkwo is a man who desires and pursues success and bravery, and so does not tolerate failure but aligns to fame. Unfortunately, “Fame makes people more, not less vulnerable because it throws them open to unlimited judgment” (Online). Okonkwo is not immuned by fame, he is thrown open to judgment, his vulnerability makes him susceptible to actions that are over superfluous and shameful. Okonkwo comes under great judgement as a result of his exulted position. Every of his action comes under scrutiny by the same people that he mingles with who hail him. Some of these come as sarcasm referring to Okonkwo’s insolence, for example, “looking at a king’s mouth, one would think he never sucked at his mother’s breast” basically alluding to Okonkwo’s unfriendly comment and impatience with the less brave and manly dispositions.

Likewise, at every misdemeanor or acts of irrationality of his, Okonkwo is cajoled and his respect wanes. With this it is believed that Okonkwo does not

heed to caution. This notion is captured by Romanus Egudu in the essay, "Chinua Achebe's Counselling Creativity" stating that, "Okonkwo is one of those whom friends and relations try to dissuade from one course of violent action or another" (Okike 98). For example "Ogbuefi Ezeudu counsels Okonkwo against participating in killing Ikemefuna, "that boy calls you father... I want you to have nothing to do with it. Okonkwo is trailed by violence in his actions. Egudu confirms that Okonkwo is of course heedless, for he not only participates, but strikes the boy dead himself" (99). Not taking to caution may be assumed pomposity and pride. Okonkwo's inability to listen to others' opinions is perhaps borne out of self-conceit. However, Akwanya is of the view about Okonkwo's irrationality suggesting that "Okonkwo's father's failure to live up to the masculine code of Umuofia is the ghost that haunts Okonkwo. But, he is sure that he has learned how to lay that ghost. But the fact is that the ghost cannot be laid" (Okike 116), and so the ghost resurrects intermittently in the avoidable spates of violent acts committed by Okonkwo both in his home front and outside.

It is recorded that "Okonkwo ruled his household with a heavy hand. His wives, especially the youngest, lived in perpetual fear of his fiery temper, and so 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 the weakness" (*Things Fall Apart* 11). For example, he beats Ojiugo heavily in the week designated for non-violence for not cooking his lunch. Okonkwo comes under attack for his action, despite the fact that his anger and provocation is adjudged "justifiable". Okonkwo bit his lips as anger welled up within him (23). However typical of Okonkwo, he omits the opportunity to evade violation of regulation of the season of peace when he refuses to consider the pleas of his other wives reminding him of the season of peace, nor the voices of neighbours over the walls. "But Okonkwo was not the man to stop beating somebody half-way through, not even for fear of a goddess" (24). It takes pride to dishonor the gods. This character flaw records against Okonkwo "as one of the numerous instances of his unguarded impetuosity which make Charles Nnoli remark that Okonkwo fails because he is not a leader of his people whose mores he breaks, whose wise counsel he does not seek or take, whose caution he squanders" (Okike 99). Okonkwo does not want to appear a failure, the inert passion for manliness pushes him far above rational thinking and reasoning. With this, he guards against incidents that may present him as weak, including taking advice, caution, or reprimand.

Okonkwo wants to be in control of his affairs and nearly commits another careless murder. He barely falls short of shooting Ekwefi on the eve of the new yam festival for merely cutting off plantain leaves and

retorting on gun that does not shoot. "And then the storm burst. Okonkwo, who had been walking about aimlessly in his compound in suppressed anger, suddenly found an outlet" (30). Okonkwo beats Ekwefi thoroughly, leaving her and her daughter weeping. The sound of the gun creates great fear in his household. This unguarded action of his attracts heavy criticism on himself. Okonkwo also comes heavy on Nwoye for his laziness. "Okonkwo's first son, Nwoye, was then twelve years old but was already causing his father great anxiety for his incipient laziness" (11). Okonkwo fears that his son may end up like his father Unoka. He detests Nwoye's laziness with a passion. "It is for this reason that he constantly bullies Nwoye and transforms him into a sulking juvenile who escapes from his father's presence at the least opportunity because of the feeling of insecurity that overwhelms him whenever he is with his father" (Nwahunanya 328). The sour relationship between Okonkwo and his son counts negatively to his honour and diminishes his fame.

Beyond his family, Okonkwo has no patience with unsuccessful men and has a way of dealing with the weak and less enterprising men. He calls Osugo a woman for opposing him at a meeting, "the man who had contradicted him had no titles. That was why he had called him a woman. Okonkwo knew how to kill a man's spirit" (TFA 21). This action of Okonkwo attracts the disapproval of the rest of the elders at the meeting, as "everybody at the kindred meeting took sides with Osugo" (21). Though Okonkwo apologizes for his utterance, it had reduced his fame and respect in the sight of the people.

Okonkwo's exile to Mbanta was a great humiliation to him. Okonkwo suffers an unexpected punishment for committing an inadvertent murder at the burial of Ezeudu. The pain of leaving one's land forcefully in such circumstance is a dent on his accumulated fame. He feels like a small man, depressed and despaired. 'For him everything has been broken. He had been cast out of his clan like a fish onto a dry, sandy beach, panting. Clearly, his personal god or chi was not made for great things. A man could not rise beyond the destiny of his chi" (*Things Fall Apart* 104). This circumstance of the forced exile crashed Okonkwo's reputation. He is disgraced by the same tradition he strives set to protect. At his mother's place, Okonkwo feels so depressed, isolated and unhappy such that his uncle "Uchendu, saw clearly that Okonkwo had yielded to despair" (104). It is clear that at each point of his misdemeanor, Okonkwo has the repercussion that brings him shame and stigma. His anger and impatience are factors of his downfall. Hence, his intolerance of the foreign religion becomes his waterloo. Gregg Henriques observes that "Shame emerges when people feel they have failed, when people are rejected or perceive that they are somehow lesser in value than they wished" (Online). The fear of failure triggers

Okonkwo's shameful actions that bring him down to ridicule.

### The Irreconcilable Worlds of Fame and Shame

Okonkwo is cut up living in his worlds of fame and shame. These two are common factors of his identity. It is commonly known that Okonkwo is well known in Umuofia and its surrounding towns. It is also known that Okonkwo is hot tempered and has traces of violence following his citations. This trait of violence manifest alongside the good virtues in him as described in text, "when he walked, his heels hardly touched the ground and he seemed to walk on springs, as if he was going to pounce on somebody. And he did pounce on people quite often" (3). He joggles through a life of bravery, hard work, tenacity and the world of inconsideration and intolerance for the less unfortunate people. Okonkwo could not reconcile his world and that of his father Unoka. He lives in fear. Thus:

It was the fear of himself, lest he should be found to resemble his father. Even as a little boy he had resented his father's failure and weakness, and even now he still remembers how he had suffered when a playmate had told him that his father was *Agbala* ... And so Okonkwo was ruled by one passion – to hate everything that his father Unoka had loved. One of those things was gentleness and another was idleness (*Things Fall Apart* 11).

Okonkwo is entangled in the fear of being thought weak and this rules his life and existence. He extends his dislike for his father's laxity to his son Nwoye, who does not show physical strength and enterprise as himself. He descends heavily on Nwoye with nagging. This explains why Okonkwo greatly rejects Nwoye's new found interest in following the white missionaries. So when eventually the report of Nwoye's association was brought to him, he nearly strangulates him. "He seized a heavy stick that lay on the dwarf wall and hit him two or three savage blows" (122). It takes the intervention of Uchendu, Okonkwo's uncle before he left him alone. Okonkwo feels Nwoye is a disgrace as he bemoans "how he could have begotten a woman for a son" (123). He ruminates in anger. "As Okonkwo sat in his hut that night, gazing into a log fire, he thought over the matter. A sudden fury rose within him and he felt a strong desire to take up his matchet, go to the church and wipe out the entire vile and miscreant gang" (122). This inner hatred for the foreign religion was to be his final blow and disintegration of his worldviews. This triggers his action of confronting the white missionaries as soon as he gets back to Umuofia at the expiration of his exile. Akwanya and Anohu aver that "the presence of the white man in Abame is considered by Okonkwo unacceptable. Accepting them in his own Umuofia is all the more unthinkable. So it is settled in Okonkwo's consciousness that forceful opposition against the new comers is what has to be done, their presence is for him already a state of conflict, only their expulsion could

restore peace" (51-2). Coming back after years of exile, he continues to nurse the ambition of setting Umuofia in motion according to his passion:

Okonkwo knew that he had lost his place among the nine masked spirits who administered justice in the clan. He had lost the chance to lead his warlike clan against the new religion, which, he was told, had gained ground. He had lost the years in which he might have taken the highest titles in the clan. But some of these losses were not irreparable. He was determined that his return should be marked by his people. He would return with a flourish, and regain the seven wasted years (*Things Fall Apart* 137).

This particular desire comes with a heavy blow. Things are not as easy as Okonkwo anticipates, as things have actually gone beyond his individual control. The clan had undergone such profound change during his exile. "Okonkwo was deeply grieved. And it was not just a personal grief. He mourned for the clan, which he saw breaking up and falling apart, and he mourned for the warlike men of Umuofia, who had so unaccountably become soft like women" (146). It becomes increasingly difficult for Okonkwo to reconcile the old and current Umuofia warriors, men and the events of the day, taken over by business, religion and government. The people's interests seem to have shifted away from the traditional Umuofia heritage, values, and occupation.

Roscoe in *Mother is Gold* confirming the likelihood of the Umuofia's acceptance of white missionaries business and government opines that "culture are colliding in Africa and the collision is painful, and it must not be forgotten that the encounter has a background history of humiliating colonialism and slavery" (3). Umuofia does not seem to interpret the situation the same way as Okonkwo, who is quick to become antagonistic. He eventually is humiliated by the new religion which takes away his first son, Nwoye. With this, Okonkwo is drawn to war with the intruders. Added to this Umuofia suffers humiliation of the desecration of a masked spirit by Enoch, the white man's messenger. Adrain observes that "African cultural collusion has necessarily involved the loss of a certain part of the traditional heritage while western cultural elements have been absorbed". Umuofia gives a nod to the white missionaries in spite of the abomination and inconveniences they suffer and experience, Ajofia tells Mr. Smith, "you can stay with us if you like our ways. You can worship your own god. It is good that a man should worship the gods and the spirits of his fathers" (*Things Fall Apart* 152). This position is totally unacceptable to Okonkwo. The worst humiliation of Umuofia and elders include the imprisonment and prosecution of the elders on account of their revenge for the desecration of the masked spirit. "It happened so quickly that the six men did not see it coming. There was only a brief scuffle, too brief to allow the drawing of a sheathed matchet. The six men

were handcuffed and led into the guardroom” (154). The humiliation perpetrated by the head messenger and who was “also the prisoner’s barber, took down his razor and shaved off all the hair on the man’s head. They were still handcuffed, and they just sat and moped” (155). Having gone through mockery, taunt and dehumanization in the hands of the whiteman’s messengers, “Okonkwo was choked with hate” (156) “and he swore vengeance” (159). Much as Umuofia has restraint in dealing with the white man and messengers, Okonkwo does not have any consideration for lenience or compromise.

Ifeyinwa Okolo is of the opinion that “Okonkwo’s return to his fatherland is not as joyful as he had hoped. Umuofia Obododike is gradually losing its masculinity and rapidly learning to be feminine” (134). Okonkwo is not disappointed that they allowed the other messengers to escape unhurt after he cuts off the head of the head messenger. “He knew Umuofia would not go to war. He knew because they had let the other messengers escape. They had broken into tumult instead of action ... He heard them asking: why did he do it” (163). Contrasting his reaction with that of the inaction of Umuofia, it is deduced that “Okonkwo’s manner of opposition and confrontation of the white man ... seems to be the reason to think that Okonkwo’s manner of opposition is unwise, even fool handy” (Akwanya and Anohu 51). It is here that Okonkwo fails to reconcile his world of fame. He is filled with shame as he faces avoidable humiliation. And to end it all he hangs himself. Neda states that “to experience shame, individuals need an ability to form self- representations, internalize external values, and compare and evaluate themselves” (77). In the ongoing, Okonkwo fails to internalize the external aggression and molestation coming from the white authority. And according to Henriques, “those that experience shame report strong desire to hide or avoid social scrutiny or judgment. They feel weak, shrunken, defeated, and self critically” (Online). Hence, to avert further humiliation owing to his cutting off the head of the head messengers Okonkwo hangs himself. Okonkwo fails to accept the trending dispensation of the presence of the new religion and this lead to his shameful death.

## CONCLUSION

All through the life journey of Okonkwo, he has the dual stigma of fame and popularity, and blame and shame following him. His temper and latent passion for manliness predisposes his susceptibility to blames. He is criticised for high handedness on his family. He is cajoled for having a hand in the death of Ikemefuna, and he pays the final blow of being buried as a stranger for fighting to save his Umuofia. In all these he carries the tag of violence. He fails to fate for failing to draw a line between power and reason, between passion and compromise. Okolo is of the opinion that “failing to read the handwriting on the wall even after he has spent much of his time mourning the rapid feminization of

Umuofia, Okonkwo believes that charisma as a warrior will move his clan to fight. He has miscalculated. He stands alone in killing the head messenger sent to stop the clan’s meeting” (134). Whatever humiliating situations he finds himself, Akwanya and Anohu aver that “the role he is having to play in all these cannot be something he is doing joyfully. Already as a man of action, he is proceeding with something he has settled in his mind as having to be done, even though it might mean ruin” (49). Okonkwo’s worldviews are products of his conscious existence. He has from the beginning conducted his mind to never accommodate or compromise femininity. His desire is to restore things to the way, they had been, not to change them in line with some idea” but the consequence is that personal revenge becomes enlarged and complicated, so that it doubles as a political act” (54). It however becomes impossible for Okonkwo to find a meeting point between his worlds of recognition and that of desolation.

Diala in his inaugural lecture observes that Achebe in his 1990 Odenigbo lecture criticizes Okonkwo as betraying his Igbo culture inspite of his prowess and good virtues. Says that “Achebe does not indict Okonkwo for being so narrowly fixated that he fails to recognize the attractions of life’s dualities only to replicate the same flaw himself in his assessment of the character (39). This situation is due to Okonkwo’s failure of judgment. He could not accommodate the impending new norms being enthroned by the prevailing time.

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