THE QUEST FOR MANHOOD IN CHINUA ACHEBE'S *THINGS FALL APART*

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Abstract:
Traditional societies, especially patrilineal, have considered women as inferior to men and therefore vow less or no respect at all to this gender. As such, a man who cannot take up some of his manly duties is regarded as a woman. Such is the case with Unoka, Okonkwo's father, in *Things Fall Apart*. Okonkwo, the son, who had suffered a lot from his father's failure, undertook a perpetual struggle to deserve the status of "true men". If The quest appears to some extents beneficial for the individual and his community, it however helps to further marginalise women in that it denies them the opportunity to play their role as full agents for development.
Key – words: Manhood – Gender - Patrilineal – Marginalise – Development

Résumé:
Les sociétés traditionnelles, en particulier celles de type patrilinéaire, considèrent la femme inférieure à l'homme et lui vouent par conséquent très peu de respect ou rien du tout. Ainsi, tout homme qui ne parvient pas à assumer certains de ses devoirs d'homme est vu comme une femme ; c'est le cas d'Unoka, le père d'Okonkwo dans *Things Fall Apart*. Okonkwo, le fils, qui a beaucoup souffert de l'échec de son père, entreprit une lutte perpétuelle pour mériter le statut qui est celui « des hommes vrais ». La quête apparaît dans une certaine mesure bénéfique pour l'individu et sa communauté. Cependant, elle contribue à marginaliser les femmes en ce qu'elle ne leur laisse aucune opportunité de jouer leur rôle de véritable agent de développement
Mots – clés: Masculinité – Genre – Patrilinéaire – Marginaliser – Développement.

INTRODUCTION

Dealing with the quest for manhood in the XXI.st century may seem somewhat surprising and even unthinkable. Whereas the trends in the century is to promote women, such a debate could make sense only if one was willing to explore the complex but rich tradition of Africa and the popular vision of its people.

In effect, the same way a soldier is expected to be loyal to his nation, and a slave to his master, asserting one's masculinity in traditional societies is a duty. It remains of a great concern to such an extent that a man who fails to fulfil some of his manly duties is automatically regarded as a woman. He is thus dishonoured; together with his family. So, people who are in this uncomfortable position or who think, they could have such a dreadful fate, will indulge in a deadly struggle against their destiny in order to avoid being ridiculed so as to deserve the status of male. They thus refuse to be women by attempting to regain their manhood. *Things Fall Apart*[1], the corpus for this work, seems to stress this perpetual quest for manhood through especially the character of Obi Okonkwo, a typical product of Ibo tradition.

[1] Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, London, Heinemann Educational books Ltd, 1958

This analysis based on a socio critical approach will first of all shed light on the possible reasons leading to the quest for manhood; it will then show the manifestations of this quest before bringing out in the end the consequences of such a quest.

I REASONS LEADING TO THE QUEST FOR MANHOOD

Among different reasons that could be at the basis of the quest for manhood in *Things Fall Apart* are: the characteristics of a patriarchal society and then the fear for the individual to be considered as a woman.

11 The Characteristics of a Patriarchal Society

Social authority in traditional Africa is determined by various factors, one of which is the lineage. A traditional African society is said to be patrilineal or matrilineal. While the former considers the authority of the father as preponderant, the latter emphasizes the authority from the mother and her lineage. The Ibo society, to which Okonkwo belongs, happens to be patrilineal. Obviously, the characteristics of such a society have something to do with Okonkwo's furious manhood in as much as a patriarchal society values male chauvinism and promotes a profound discrimination against the feminine.

111. The Promotion of Male Values.

It would be worth having an idea about the notion of Man to understand the infatuation of patriarchal societies for the promotion of male values. The French dictionary, *Le Dictionnaire de la Langue Française Encyclopédie Noms Propres,* defines Man as '' Etre humain. L'homme le plus évolué des êtres vivants, appartient à la famille des hominidés et à l'espèce homo sapiens. Etre humain de sexe masculin''[2].

At first sight, this definition presents man as a human being endowed with consciousness, that is, unlike the other living species, Man is capable of thinking and can thus operate conscious choices as opposed to an animal. Man from this point of view includes both sexes. Yet, when one comes to the last part of the definition: "être humain de sexe masculin", the concept of Man rather refers to a category of the human gender which has particular physical and physiological characteristics such as the male sex.

Beside this literary definition above, there is another approach by traditional societies among which, the Ibo. For amongst the Ibo, is considered a man, a human being having some virtues recognised as male values. A man should thus be courageous, hard working, honest, independent, proud and provident. A man, according to the norms of traditional societies should not bring home dishonour and shame. A man should not be a liar, neither a betrayer, nor be a coward. A man is somebody one can invest with, who has a strong sense of responsibility, an initiate, someone who has been able to overcome ordeals and can take part in elder people's assemblies to decide on the life of his community.

The different initiation ceremonies and generation feasts still under performance in developing countries like those of Africa, Latin-America and Asia, all account for the promotion of male values. These practices were much more emphasized in traditional societies, and the Ibo society is not in contradiction with this reality. In fact, when initiating wrestling matches, the Ibo intend to celebrate courage and strength which are part of male values. It is still the need to promote male values that has led the Ibo to establish titles in their society. Of course does not become an "Ndichi"[3] who wants; only men who have proved to be "true men" can deserve this title.

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[2] *Dictionnaire de la Langue Française Encyclopédie Noms Propres,* Paris, Hachette, 1950, p.627

[3] In Ibo tribe, an "Ndichi" is an initiate having warned different tittles and who has been accepted in the group of elders who are to decide about the life of the community.

While man is respected and honoured in patriarchal societies, women are hardly vowed any respect. They are subjected to different forms of discriminations; hence their precarious position.

112 The Precarious Position of Women

Woman is defined as "être humain de sexe féminin, du sexe qui met au monde des enfants. La femme dans ce qu'elle a de spécifique qui l'oppose à l'homme''[4].

It is clear from this definition that there is no confusion between mankind and woman as it is the case with man. The word woman expresses only a human being with the female sex, capable of delivering. While Man can mean human beings in general, woman is restricted to only those who possess a female sex.

However, like man, there is still a particular approach to woman in traditional societies. Some sociological and cultural influences have led these societies to consider on the one hand that a woman should possess some qualities among which sweetness, care, submission etc. and to assert on the other hand their congenital incapacities: they are regarded as unreliable, dependent, weak, hurtful, useless, inferior and doomed to remain eternally children.

The preconceived ideas or the mistaken vision that people have had of women for ages have resulted in the marginalisation of the latter in most societies. The Ibo also share this vision about women. They too, consider women as inferior beings who owe respect and submission to their husbands and who have to take care of the children. This explains the rage of Okonkwo which made him beat his youngest wife when he came back home and discovered that she was absent when she should be feeding the children[5].

The marginalisation of women has led to numerous injustices and violence towards this gender. Forced marriage, genital mutilation, the muzzling, the rude treatments towards widows, the sacrifice of virgin girls to gods, are so many proofs of the ill treatments women are subjected to every days and everywhere in the world. It is no doubt that the status of women in society results from the preconceived ideas or false vision people have of them. As such, women would hardly hold important positions in the society and are thus bound to do less important jobs which hardly lead them to be self sufficient. In the end, women are trapped in social conventions such as marriage which make them mere servants of their husbands.

This dark picture of the female sex shows that the condition of women is not at all a gleaming one in the world and particularly in tradition societies; let alone in patriarchal societies. And this is why Okonkwo, like many other men in his position, fears to be considered as women.

1.2- The Fear to be Considered as a Woman

The fear which is one of the main reasons of the quest may derive from two important factors: the idea people have of a man who lacks manly virtues and the awareness of the individual threaten by feminity.

121- The Image of a Man who Lacks Manly Virtues in Patriarchal Society

Lacking manly virtues in traditional societies and particularly in a patrilineal one, is a burden for the individual concerned who loses all dignity, honour and respect. Moreover, the latter's family is involved in his shame throughout generations. In the case of *Thing Fall Apart*, the individual directly concerned with disgrace is Unoka, Okonkwo's father, because of his laziness and idleness.

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[4] *Dictionnaire de la Langue Française Encyclopédie Noms Propres*, Paris, Hachette, p.498

[5] Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall A part*, London, Heinemann Educational books Ltd, 1958, p. 26-27

The Ibo society as well as any African society, values work. A man is mainly respected for his devotion at work. For instance, a man's richness and greatness is measured according to the quantity of yams he can harvest a year, yams being the main crop in Ibo society. A man's importance also depends on his ability to have a large family, that is to say, many wives and children. In the end, a man is valued for his capacity to win different titles and be able to climb up the social ladder. Unfortunately, Okonkwo's father, not only had no farm to satisfy the needs of his small family, but he did not win any title at all. The following extract gives an idea about the shameful and dishonoured position of Unoka in the Ibo society:

> Unoka, for that was his father's name, died ten year ago.
> In his days he was lazy and improvident and was quiet
> incapable of thinking about tomorrow… Unoka,,the
> grown up was a failure. He was poor and his wife
> and children had barely enough to eat. People laughed
> at him because he was a loafer, and they swore never
> to lend him any more money because he never paid back.[6]

The passage leaves no doubt about Unoka's laziness and idleness. The whole rhetoric used to qualify this "female man" suffices to convince readers of his dishonoured position. In fact, Unoka's position is one of the most degrading, frustrating and womanish that an individual, namely a man, can face in a patriarchal society; a position which above all, affects terribly his family. Hence the indignation of Okwonko, the son, once the latter will be aware and conscious of his father's image in the society.

1.2.2- The Awareness of the Individual Threaten by the Dread of Feminity

The awareness may come either from the individual himself, from other people or an event. In the case of Okonkwo, both elements helped in his awareness. In effect, Okonkwo himself knew his father's weak position even as a young boy. Events also proved it until the day when a playmate confirmed openly that Unoka was an 'abgala'[7]. This news was received by Okonkwo as a bludgeon stroke and prompted him into a phase of internal turmoil which even became psychological. Okonkwo's trouble became mainly psychological in that he was aware of the shame his father brought to the family and was conscious of it. The following extract enlightens the psychological trouble Okonkwo was facing and which will influence his behaviour all his life long.

> 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 of magic. It was not
> external but lay deep within himself it was the fear of
> himself lest he should be found to resemble his father.[8]

As we could notice from the extract above, the fear that Okonkwo was confronted with was a great fear. This fear was incommensurable in that it was not physical and therefore gave him no chance to face it. It was rather within him, unseen but shaking him unendlessly, conditioning him and making him dependent of his quest. As a drug addict, it was difficult for Okonkwo to detach himself from that feeling because he was aware of it. And any time he thought of it or he was recalled it, it shook him all the more.

The permanent trouble of Okonkwo in front of his unwillingness to overcome his dread is evidenced by this extract:"*Even as a little boy, he has resented his father's failure and weakness, and even now, he still remembered how he had suffered when a play-mate had told*

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[6] Op. Cit, p.3-4
[7] Ibo word meaning woman
[8] Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall A part*, London, Heinemann Educational books Ltd, 1958, p. 12-13

him that his father was an agbala"[9]. Agbala meaning a woman but also a man who had not taken any title, one can easily guess Okonkwo's frustration to be the son of a lazy man, a man without honour. This shock will control Okonkwo's behaviour later on as one could notice with this other extract: ‘*'and so, Okonkwo was ruled by one passion to hate everything that his father Unoka had loved. One of these things was gentleness and another was idleness"*[10]. That moment of psychological trouble will lead Okonkwo to take some steps in order to escape failure. The lack of manly virtues being the main cause of his father's failure, Okonkwo will find the remedy in what is opposed to womanhood, hence his quest for manhood, the manifestations of which are dealt with in the chapter that follows.

II- THE MANIFESTATIONS OF THE QUEST

It is to be noted that some structures are set up in traditional societies to accompany the individual in his quest for manhood. Among those structures is the family which plays an important role. As a young boy, Okonkwo should normally have benefited from his father's experience. Unfortunately, Okonkwo seemed to have 'no father' because Unoka his father, was an 'agbala'.He thus had to count on himself. His quest which to some extents emanates from his personal experience is manifested through his rejection of womanhood and his burning desire to be a man.

2.1- The Rejection of Womanhood

Okonkwo's rejection of womanhood is shown on the one hand by a tendency to despise women and any womanish attitude or behaviour and on the other, the tendency to distance himself from anything that is womanish.

2.1.1 The Tendency to Despise Women

The contempt for women is stressed by Okonkwo's rudeness towards women. As a matter of fact, he will not hesitate to beat his wives when they fail to behave as he wishes. The following two quotations account for Okonkwo's hard heartedness towards his wives:

> Okonkwo was provoked to justifiable anger by his youngest wife, who went to plait her hair at her friend's house and did not return early enough to cook for afternoon meal… He walked back into his obi to wait Ojiugo's return and when she returned, he beat her very heavily[11].

> Okonkwo's second wife has merely cut a few leaves off it to wrap some food, and she said so. Without further argument Okonkwo gave her a sound beating and left her and her only daughter weeping[12].

One will notice that in both extracts the intentions of Okonkwo's wives were not bad as such. In the first quotation, Okonkwo's youngest wife went out to plait her hair as most women do, just to make herself beautiful in order to please her husband. In the second extract, it was also because Okonkwo's second wife was aware of her duty as a house wife that she cut the leaves of the banana tree which aim at wrapping food. And yet, Okonkwo could not understand their devotion to serve him and beat them instead.

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[9] Ibid, p.13
[10] Ibid, p. 13
[11] Op. Cit, p.27
[12] Ibid, p.35

Now concerning the contempt for womanish behaviour, it is shown by the disregard of Okonkwo and some other titled men for the custom of neighbouring villages which happened to be matrilineal and valued women. This is evidenced by the following extract from the chat Okonkwo had with his friends: *"It was only this morning, said Obierika that Okonkwo and I were talking about Abane and Anita where titled men climb trees and pound foofoo for their wives"*[13]. In fact, given the social practices and values in force in Okonkwo's tribe, he and his friends, all titled men, could not stand the fact that their colleagues at Abane and Anita carry out an activity like pounding foofoo which is essentially regarded as a woman's affair.

The contempt for women and their behaviour will lead Okonkwo to distance himself from what is regarded as womanish.

2.1.2- The Tendency to Keep at a Distance from What is Womanish

This tendency is shown by Okonkwo's behaviour during the new yam festival. In fact, that festival has always been an occasion of joy and rejoicing; an occasion where people do not farm. Instead, they rest in the village and have a good time eating and drinking. Yet, unlike this widespread vision of the villagers about that festival, Okonkwo could not bear it. For him, that moment of rejoicing prevents him from working. And Okonkwo, who refuses to be idle, cannot appreciate this moment, he considers womanish. His lack of enthusiasm in the passage below, stresses his will to keep at a distance from any womanish attitude:

> Okonkwo could never become as enthusiastic over
> feasts as most people. He was a good eater and he could
> drink one or two fairly big gourds of palm wine.
> But he was always uncomfortably sitting around
> For days waiting for a feast or getting over it.
> He would be much happier working on his farm[14]

Another element to show Okonkwo's intention to be distant from all that is womanish seems to be his reaction vis a vis his lazy son N'woye in the following extract:

> Okonkwo's first son N'woye was then twelve years
> old but was already causing his father great anxiety
> for his incipient laziness. At any rate, that was how
> it looked to his father, and he thought to correct him
> by constant nagging and beating[15].

When nagging and beating his son, Okonkwo intends to detach the latter from his womanish behaviour, a state he does not appreciate at all. Also, while trying to keep his son from this dishonoured behaviour, Okonkwo aimed at keeping his family far from another "agbala"; it is in fact, the dread of the reincarnation of Unoka which is at the basis of his fury towards his son. Contrary to the moroseness Okonkwo feels for women and their behaviour, he has a burning desires to be a "true man".

2.2- The Desire to be a Man

This desire is evidenced by Okonkwo's great regard for any manly behaviour and his constant search for male values.

2.2.1- The Regard for any Manly Behaviour

In this quest for manhood, Okonkwo has a great admiration for any action that seems manlike. Hence his great pride to see later on N'woye, his womanish child, become progressively a man as emphasises this extract: *"Okonkwo was inwardly pleased at his son's*

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[13] Ibid, p.67-67
[14] Op. Cit, p. 34
[15] Ibid, p.13

development and he knew it was due to Ikemefuna… and so he was always happy when he heard him grumbling about women. That showed that in time, he will be able to control his woman folk"[16]

Okonkwo's wish to see his son become a man preoccupied him to such a point that even N'woye's show of his rejection of women stories sets his father in a happy mood as stresses this passage:

> He knew that his father wanted him to be a man and
> So he feigned that he no longer cared for women's stories.
> And when he did this, he saw that his father was pleased
> and no longer rebuked him or beat him. So N'woye and
> Ikemefuna would listen to Okonkwo's stories about tribal
> Wars or how he obtained his first human head.[17]

The great regards for manly behaviour will also lead him not only to admire his daughter Ezinma but to prefer her to N'woye his son; this, because Okonkwo has come to discover that his daughter behaves like a man. The following paragraph throws light on Okonkwo's attitude towards his daughter: "*Okonkwo was very lucky in this daughter. He never stopped regretting that Ezinma was a girl. Of his children she alone understood his every mood. A bond of sympathy had grown between them as the years had passed*"[18]. Okonkwo's love for his daughter is in the end confirmed by his thought as it reads: "*I wish she were a boy Okonkwo thought within himself. Who else among his children could have read his thought as well?*"[19]

Beside the great regards for manly behaviours, another remarkable attitude in Okonkwo's desire to be a man seems to be his constant search for male values.

2.2.2- The Search for Male Values

The search for male values has been a major concern for Okonkwo in view to prove his manhood. It is in this vein that all along *Things Fall Apart*, one will notice different actions of courage and strength undertaken by Okonkwo. As a matter of fact, at the age of eighteen, Okonkwo signalled himself as a courageous man by beating the then undefeated Amalinze during a wrestling match. The following extract that gives an idea of Amalinze's qualities stresses Okonkwo's value:

> 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 M'baino. 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 man
> agreed was one of the fiercest[20].

Another proof of courage is that he was not coward; his participation in different inter tribal wars in the passage below shows it. ''Okonkwo was not afraid of war. He was a man of action, unlike his father; he could stand the look of blood. In Umuofia latest war, he was the first to bring home a man's head; and he was not an old man yet[21]".

It is in the end important to note that when cutting Ikemefuna down with his matchet and also killing the leader of the white commissioner's messengers, Okonkwo once more showed his courage and his hatred for cowardice.

Besides these actions of courage, Okonkwo was a responsible man; he inspired respect and pride. As such, at a very early age, he was striving to build a barn. And when struggling

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[16] Ibid, p47-48
[17] Ibid,p.49
[18] Op. Cit, p.156
[19] Ibid, p.157
[20] Ibid, p. 3
[21] Ibid, p.10

to have a barn built through share cropping, Okonkwo at the same time had to support his father's family; that is, his parents and two of his sisters[22]. Okonkwo's sense of responsibility is even known by the Ndichies[23] of the village who deeply trust him. As a matter of fact, they decided to send him for the mission to M'Baino and also chose him as the one who should keep the hostage as it appears in this extract: "*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"*[24]

Still in his search for male values, Okonkwo will never accept to bring home shame and disgrace. This is the very reason why he took part in the killing of Ikemefuna who could actually be considered as his own son. While participating in the sacrifice of Ikemefuna, Okonkwo did not want to be viewed as a woman; this sentence clearly conveys his intention: "*he was afraid of being thought weak*"[25]. It is in the same perspective that Okonkwo hanged himself at the end of the novel. In fact, Okonkwo was convinced that he could no longer rely upon his people who seemed to have been seized with fear in the face of the colonial Administration; an attitude he considered as womanish. The following extract shows his disappointment vis a vis his people before he made up his mind to sacrifice himself:

> Okonkwo stood looking at the dead man. He knew that 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 discerned fright in that tumult. He heard voices asking: why did he do it?[26]

In effect, contrary to actions from his people, the latter remained motionless and even seemed not to appreciate Okonkwo's attitude as they put it: "*why did he do it*?"
Okonkwo, who prides manhood and whose struggle has ever been to become a man, noticed that he no longer had his place in his community, among his people who have henceforth chosen to be "women". Moreover, he will never accept to be killed by a white commissioner with his coward guards nor would he contribute to weaken his community and its established order by a so-called civilised nation; hence his decision to put an end to his life. If he does not, he will be in contradiction with his ideal which is to run away from any womanish attitude.

The causes and the manifestations of Okonkwo's quest having been enlightened, one is compelled to question about the consequences of such a quest.

III- THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE QUEST

It is worth struggling to be a man in traditional societies especially in patrilineal ones given the cultural and sociological pressures in those societies. However, one should not deny the fact that this quest for manhood has some limits.

3.1 The Interest of the Quest

In his quest for manhood, Okonkwo has been involved into actions and situations which at first sight, may lead any ''amateur''observer of African customs and values, to consider Okonkwo as heartless, violent and a cruel protagonist and to view the latter's struggle as senseless. His participation in the sacrifice of Ikemefuna alone constitutes a tangible proof of his heartlessness. However, a deep analysis of the man, Okonkwo, and his actions will disclose that the quest for manhood, which has been the warhorse of his life, is of

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[22] Ibid, p.21
[23] The elders, mainly titled men who are decision makers of the Ibo community.
[24] Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall A part*, London, Heinemann Educational books Ltd, 1958, p.12
[25] Op. Cit, p.55
[26] Ibid, p.184

much significance. In effect, not only this quest is a means of salvation but it should also be viewed as an appeal for conversion.

3.1.1- The Quest for Manhood as a Means of Salvation

The quest for manhood is beneficial for the individual as well as his community.

With regards the individual**,** the quest becomes a means of salvation in that it contributes to his mental equilibrium or poise. In fact, it enables the individual to restore his lost dignity and become self dependent and respected. As a matter of fact, Okonkwo who was very anxious at first because he feared to become 'agbala' like his father, progressively gained confidence in him. He then became respected in the village thanks to his constant struggle. He will thus be chosen for the important mission to M'Baino in order to bring back with him, the hostage and the lady supposed to replace the murdered daughter of Umuofia.

Beside self dependence and respect, the quest for manhood enables the individual who used to be marginalized for effeminacy to be in the end fully integrated in the community; the different titles Okonkwo won permitted him to climb up the social ladder and become one of the indichies. That position henceforth held by Okonkwo, enabled him to take part in elder people's assemblies despite his young age. Likewise, he will appear in public at the side of the elders of the village as indicates this extract:

> The whole village turned out on the ilo, men,
> women and children. They stood round
> in a huge circle leaving the center of the
> playground free. The elders and grandees of
> the village sat on their own stools brought
> there by their young sons or slaves. Okonkwo was
> among them. All others stood except those who
> came early enough to secure places on the few stands[27].

Unlike Unoka, Okonkwo's father who was a steady debtor, an irresponsible man and a total failure, Okonkwo's success was obvious. This success which was the result of his steady quest for manhood was materialized by his household as confirms the following passage:

> Okonkwo's prosperity was visible in his household.
> 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 wall. Each of his three
> wives had her own hut, which together formed a
> half moon behind the Obi… Near the barn was
> a small house. The medicine house or shrine, where
> Okonkwo kept the wooden symbols of his ancestral spirit[28]

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The description above is remarkable in that it has not left a single element considered as a sign of prosperity in the Ibo community. It is also interesting to note that Okonkwo owned almost all those elements which are signs of success and respect. In fact, Okonkwo had a huge compound, three wives, lot of children, a barn which is the sign of hard work and a shed for animals. Least but not last, he was respectful of tradition as suggests the presence of a shrine in his compound. In the face of Okonkwo's worth, it goes without saying that the quest for manhood leads to self achievement; but more, it is beneficial for the community.

Now, concerning the community, the struggle of Okonkwo was not a selfish struggle. Beyond its impact on the individual as a means of self achievement, this struggle is also

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[27] Op.cit., p.42
[28] Ibid, p.13-14

meant for common interest. In effect, after Okonkwo had gained success through his quest, he will be useful for his family and his community. This is evidenced by the fact that Okonkwo could take care of his parents and his two sisters. He was also capable of feeding his numerous in-laws during important festivals as this extract stresses:

> The new yam festival was thus an occasion for joy throughout Umuofia. And every man whose arm was strong as the Ibo people say, was expected to invite large number of guests from far and wide. Okonkwo always asked his wives relation and since he now had tree wives, his guests would make a fairly big crowd[29]

In the same vein, one will notice that Okonkwo's position later on as Ndichi, gave him the rights to be among those who decide on matters regarding the community. In effect, when accepting the mission to N'Baino and participating in the sacrifice of Ikemefuna, Okonkwo thereby fulfilled a duty of general interest. As a matter of fact, his mission avoided the two neighbouring villages to enter into inter-tribal war; the drawbacks of which could have been more dreadful.

The position Okonkwo acquired in this society thanks to his constant quest for manhood, made of him an object of pride. His village was of course proud to have a virtuous son. This position also contributed to facilitate his full integration in his community.

Beside all the benefits Okonkwo's quest could generate for himself as individual as well as for the community, this quest should more be viewed as an appeal for conversion towards our present world.

3.1.2- An Appeal for Conversion.

The quest for manhood appeals for conversion towards our present world. As we pointed above, becoming a man implies carrying some virtues known as male virtues. We could recall among others: honesty, courage, loyalty. Unfortunately, few are individuals imbued with these virtues today. Honesty is henceforth replaced by dishonesty, truth by lies, courage by laziness, loyalty by cowardice, hard work by idleness etc.

As such, we are living in a society of corrupted people, thieves, murderers in a word, an immoral society in which virtues have given way to vices. We can in the end ask if we still have "men" in today's world since everybody is running after vices for an easy access to wealth. One easily agrees with Ephson, this ghanaen popular writer when he says that most of the positions held by people in the society today have been possible thanks to some awful, ridiculous and shamefull exercises. Ephson's position is explicit in the extract below:

> In many top places in society everywhere, The world over several men and women of influence attain and maintain their position by dishonest disgraceful, cruel and callous means and methods or by other ways very indecent and reprehensible. Of course, i concede that many personalities in all these spheres, of life and economic and political activities merit their position and rank and have to their credit a continued good end! Honourable character and conduct. But it may be only a handful of them, a drop in the ocean[30]

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[29] Ibid., p. 34

[30] Isaac S. Ephson, *Confessions of a Nun*, Accra, Ghana, Ilen Publications, 1st published 1980, p. 96-97

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It is in the end sad that we come to such a state of things. Certainly this is not the kind of world Okonkwo had longed for. Okonkwo foreshadowed a world in which positions are deserved. It is to be recalled to this purpose that the different titles won thanks to his perpetual quest, led him acquire the position that was his in the Ibo society. Our world needs therefore a change, a conversion of his people who ought to leave their states of "agbala" to be "true men" for a happy new world. However, this cannot be easily achieved when essential agents of development, in particular women, are still put aside.

3.2 The Limits of the Quest

The preceding chapter has shown the importance of the quest; yet, it has some limits. In fact, societies which promote the quest, in particular patrilineal, appear to a large extent to be paradoxical societies and more, have at their bosom, germs of discrimination which can impede development.

3.2.1 A Society of Paradox.

This study has shown clearly that traditional societies and especially patrilineal, are deeply attached to male values and greatly despise women and womanly attitudes. Yet, these societies cannot actually do without women. Whereas patriarchal societies reproach women for being weak, sensitive and even useless, there exist in those societies, tasks devoted to weak beings; that is, women. This is evidenced by the indignation of Okonkwo and his friends when they found out that in the neighbouring villages some men pound foofoo. In addition to those tasks relegated to the weaker sex, traditional societies expect women to be obedient, submissive, affectionate and ready to take care of the children and the husband. Let us imagine a single moment that women did not have the above qualities they are reproached with, that is to say weakness, docility, tolerance etc. who else could fulfil tasks which are supposed to relieve from women in patriarchal societies?

The paradox in these societies is also evidenced by the fact that women are given less importance and yet, they constitute a proof of richness for men who have been able to marry many. It is to be noted to this end that one of the elements which makes Okonkwo the son, different from Unoka the father, is that Okonkwo had three wives whereas his father had only one. If one has to admit that possessing women is a sign of success and richness for men in patriarchal societies, women should then be logically treasured. In fact, the same way gold is viewed as a precious object and can therefore make the one who possesses it a rich person; women should be regarded as precious beings and to whom, great respect should be granted.

The paradox in patriarchal societies can lead individual to sometime undertake paradoxical actions as well; and Okonkwo is a good illustration. In fact, he wished his womanish son N'woye to become a man. This burning desire was about to be fulfilled with the presence of Ikemefuna in Okonkwo's household as one could guess from this extract: "Okonkwo was inwardly pleased at his son's development and he knew it was due to Ikemefuna…" Unfortunately, Ikemefuna, the only hope for Okonkwo to have his son become a man, was to be killed by Okonkwo himself and some other men because the custom compelled them to do so. Ikemefuna will be of course killed; and N'woye will never become the adult his father had longed for. Thus, Okonkwo's hope to see his son become a man will vanish for ever.

Still Okonkwo's willingness in his quest for manhood led him to commit a crime and was compelled to leave his paternal village. Curiously, it is at his mother's village which is under matrilineal system that he found refuge. Okonkwo, who is distant from womanly attitudes, has never appreciated the custom of his mother's clan. His hatred for that clan is evidenced by the following reaction and appreciation he had one day towards the people there for prevailing tolerance instead of violence in the settlement of conflicts: "Okonkwo made a sound full of disgust. This was a womanly clan he thought. Such a thing could never happen

in his fatherland, Umuofia"[31]. Paradoxically, *t*his clan he hardly considered was in the end the area that could not reject Okonkwo. On the contrary, he was welcomed there with great enthusiasm.

Suppose that Okonkwo's maternal family did not have a flexible regime and that his maternal relatives were not imbued with feelings such as tenderness, love and tolerance which are thought to be female feelings, where could Okonkwo get refuge? What would then happen to him at the moment he was not needed at his father's?

3.2.2 A Factor of Injustice and Under Development

The quest for manhood in patriarchal societies has contributed to deepen the gap between men and women. The constant search for man virtues has resulted in the marginalization of women and the great injustice towards them. Beside this injustice, the quest constitutes a key factor of underdevelopment.

In fact, social values have both female and male principles. And yet, traditional societies especially patrilineal, unjustly refuse to accept female principles. This state of things has finally led most women to go along with the idea that they are useless for the society and are therefore victims of some abnormal practices. As a matter of fact, a woman can never become an indichi in okonkwo's tribe; and this accounts for Okonkwo's sorrow when Ezinma his daughter, were not a boy. "I wish she were a boy Okonkwo thought within himself. Who else among his children could have read his thought as well?"[32]

Despite worldwide trends today to promote women and have them recognised as agents of development through the introduction in the educational system by UNESCO of a program focussed on gender to reduce inequalities between women and men and especially the willingness of intellectuals to deal with feminism in international gatherings as well as in literary works such as: *Nervous Condition*[33], *C'est le Soleil qui m'a_Brûlée*[34], *Modukpè* and *le Rêve brisé*[35], most societies especially patrilineal, continue to show little or no enthusiasm as far as women emancipation is concerned.

It goes without saying that in spite of all the efforts on the subject, the lack of a real political will due to sociological and cultural weights does not facilitate the integration of women. As such, discriminations towards women are observed at any level of the society. It is to be noted that to date, women in some societies hardly have access to an important tool of development like education. In some others, school is even forbidden to women.

The fact that women are not associated in the decisions making has of course a negative impact on the development of any society in the world. The dark picture that most nations present today, results from the stubbornness of many societies which, in the name of a certain sociological and cultural inheritage continue to put women aside when taking important decisions about the lives of nations and people. The ever lasting coup d'Etats, civil wars and rebellions encountered in most countries today, are not but the result of male attitudes like violence and the lack of female values such as tolerance entertained by the so called quest for manhood. As a whole, male principles alone do not compulsory lead to development.

CONCLUSION

The quest for manhood is of a great importance in as much as it celebrates some values that can make of a "weak man" a respected being and useful to his society. The position

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[31] Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, London, Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1958,p145
[32] Ibid, p.157
[33] Tsitsi Dangarabga, *Nervous Condition*, New York, Seal Press, 2002
[34] Calixthe Beyala, *C'est le Soleil m'a brulée*, qui Paris, Edition Stock, 1987
[35] Adélaïde Fasssinou, *Modukpè, le Rêve brisé*, Paris, L'Armattan, 2000

Okonkwo held in the Ibo society and the different responsibilities he was given at times account for the importance of that quest. However, notwithstanding the interest of the quest for manhood, societies as a whole and patriarchal societies in particular which put too much emphasis on this quest, should revise their position towards women. Patriarchal societies should rather think of promoting female values which are equally important as male ones instead of holding them up to ridicule.

It is important to admit that at the side of man with all the values known as male values (rudeness, courage, pitiless, etc) should be the woman with also the qualities which are hers and for which they are constantly reproached with by men; that is: tenderness, flexibility, pity, tolerance etc.

Man with his values alone cannot do enough. As much as the right arm washes the left arm and vice versa, man and woman owe to be complementary; for it is at this sole condition that patrilineal societies so as any society in the world could achieve full development.

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