

A Comparative Analysis of Feminine Spaces in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Beckett's *Waiting For Godot*

Pethias Siame

Kwame Nkrumah University, Zambia

Jive Lubbungu

Kwame Nkrumah University, Zambia

Djalilova Malika Shuxratovna

International School of Finance and Technology, Tashkent, Uzbekistan

Abstract: The paper interrogates the similarities in how females are portrayed in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. The paper aims to highlight the similarities between the two texts regarding female spaces. This study employed a qualitative research approach and used desktop research methodology. Phenomenology theoretical locale was adopted to underpin the study. The study shows that there are more similarities than variations in the spaces provided to females in the two texts. Some similarities include seclusion from male activities, inferiority complex, oppression from self-expression, hindrance or delayed marriages, and being used as sacrificial lambs. On the other hand, Achebe uses real female characters while Beckett portrays female characteristics through males. Finally, the portrayal of women as weaker vessels in both texts is an act of male supremacy which should be discouraged in today's societies so that females are given literary spaces.

Keywords: Achebe, Beckett, male supremacy, similarities, variations

1. Introduction

Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* have been lauded as a counter to colonial writings such as Carey's *Mister Johnson* and Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* that portrayed Africa and Africans in a negative light. It is noteworthy that 'Things Fall Apart' has been criticised for condoning masculinity and patriarchal ideologies that battle, ownership of yam farms and a large compound, and single-mindedness at clan meetings that celebrate the marginalisation of women. Similarly, *Waiting for Godot* is criticized for the same act where male characters take up the feminine spaces.

Okonkwo is characterised as physically overwhelmingly powerful, prosperous, commanding, and not immune to episodes of violence to men, women, and his children who crossed his path. These attributes are revered by Achebe's Igbo society in which male and female roles in society are fixed and mutually exclusive. This pattern of behaviour is also evident in *Waiting for Godot* where male characters act in manners that suggest homosexuality (Lubbungu and Siame, 2023). Okonkwo's rigidities in affirming masculinity and patriarchal characteristics are matched by his prowess at wrestling and in mating out justice in his household.

This article is not to critique articles that have argued that Achebe champions masculine and patriarchal predispositions that marginalise women; rather, the paper aims to evaluate the performance of feminine spaces in the novels *Things Fall Apart* and *Waiting for Godot*. Achebe depicts the male and female roles in Igbo society as not discontinuous just like the physical and spiritual worlds are interconnected. Achebe characterises Ezinma as not only challenging masculinity

| | |
|---|--|
| 8 | ISSN 2349-7793 (online), Published by INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH IN COMMERCE, IT, ENGINEERING AND SOCIAL SCIENCES, under Volume: 18 Issue: 03 in March-2024 https://www.gejournal.net/index.php/IJRCIESS |
| | Copyright (c) 2024 Author (s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY). To view a copy of this license, visit https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/ |

but also taking charge of Okonkwo's household and needs when he is incarcerated. On many occasions, Okonkwo acknowledges that Ezinma performs the roles associated with the male gender very well, but he still wishes she were male.

This article demonstrates that although Igbo society reveres attributes associated with masculinity, it abhors excessive and abusive use of power associated with the male role, lest the harmonious workings of the male-female roles, and the physical-spiritual worlds, are destabilised to the detriment of Igbo society. This literature shows that some of the spiritual worlds are controlled by powerful female forces or gods that function to maintain harmony. The female forces or gods have reincarnations in the physical world – thus essentially connecting the two worlds. Ezinma being described as an *ogbanje*, a genderless spirit or a spirit in human form is a depiction of a powerful woman transcending two worlds. Ultimately, the article shows that Okonkwo's excessive use of physical and other forms of power associated with masculinity and patriarchy destabilises the harmonious workings of the female-male, and the spiritual-physical dimensions, which has negative consequences for people in Achebe's depicted Igbo society and Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. The paper progresses as follows; introduction, literature review, theoretical locale, methodology, results and discussions, and conclusion.

2. Literature Review

Literature shows that several studies have examined Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* using a feminist approach. The studies have concluded that Achebe portrays a masculine dominant and patriarchal society in *Things Fall Apart* which is in tandem with how Beckett portrays females in *Waiting for Godot*. It is envisaged that female spaces are dominated by males even in activities that females are capable of doing.

Strong-Leek (2001:1) seeks "to read *Things Fall Apart* as a woman ... [in order] to identify the specific defences and distortions of male readings and provide corrections". In the feminist analysis of *Things Fall Apart*, Strong-Leek (2001) argues that Okonkwo is not the major character in *Things Fall Apart*. He is only a major character if we read the novel as a man, not as a woman. Strong-Leek (2001) further observes that Okonkwo's downfall is caused by his seeds of destruction, concealed in his desire to be the antagonist of his feminine father. Strong-Leek (2001) further notes that as Achebe looks at Okonkwo, he greatly overlooks the suffering of women and children. "This observation is seen when one takes a feminist look at female characters such as Ekwefi, Ezinma and Ojiugo who endure beatings and other forms of oppression, showing that the unanimity of the patriarchy is the main priority of the community, rather than the physical safety of its women" (Strong-Leek, 2001:3). Strong-Leek (2001) concludes that *Things Fall Apart* is a novel that portrays a patriarchal notion that devalues women through beatings, insults and threats. Similar to Strong-Leek's (2001) perspectives are those of Alzuabi's (2012) who examines women's oppression and solidarity in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Hassan (2016) who explores the image of women in three of Achebe's novels: *Things Fall Apart*, *No Longer at Ease* and *Arrow of God*. It is worth noting that Alzuabi's (2012) is among few literary scholars who conducted a comparative study between Female solidarity against oppression in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Naylor's *The Women of Brewster Palace*. The similarity between the current study and that of Strong-Leek (2001), Alzuabi (2012), and Hassan (2016) is that they all provide a feminist reading of the same novel – *Things Fall Apart*. In a more recent study, Chilala (2019) investigates how textual, physical, and socio-cultural space is used in the construction of male and female characters in *Things Fall Apart*, which is reflected in masculine-

dominated unequal distribution and physical utilisation of space. Chilala opines that the male domination in these spaces provides them the contexts and pre-texts to marginalise females by pushing them to the periphery of society. This notion reduces the feminine spaces of females in both *Things Fall Apart* and *Waiting for Godot*. Females in the two texts are overzealous even to do tasks meant for males such as Ezinma carrying the stool for the father, but their spaces are usually marginalised in the name of societal normal that favour male supremacy.

Chilala (2019), Strong-Leek (2001), Alzuabi (2012), and Hassan (2016) use what we might call a general feminist reading of *Things Fall Apart* from a literary single-text perspective. This article is comparative which analyses the feminine spaces in two texts namely *Things Fall Apart* and *Waiting for Godot* which seem to share commonalities. By conducting a comparative feminist study of *Things Fall Apart* and *Waiting for Godot* using the analytical lens of phenomenology theory and the notion of Butler's (1988) feminist performative identity theory, the article not only sheds more light on earlier research but also provides a different reading and interpretation perspective of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*.

Butler (1988) argues that gender is not fixed; it is representative of repeated social acts, whose identity is sanctioned by stylised repetition of performances. The scholar shows that gender is understood as the stylisation of the body and "the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self" (Butler, 1988). This argument shows that gender is seen as socially constructed conceptions or beliefs and not permanent and internally uninterrupted identity. Butler (1988) adds that gender is constituted by stylised acts, then it can be subverted and overturned leading to gender transformation and gender-bending repeated acts of defiance of social sanction and taboo.

Literature shows that Akingbe & Ogunyemi (2017) write about how female Nigerian authors such as Buchi Emecheta, Zaynab Alkali, Lola Shoneyin, Chika Unigwe and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, have reacted to what they see as Achebe's affirmation of masculine energy, tenacity and determination through Okonkwo's characterisation, by created strong women characters and plots in their novels that deconstruct masculinity by imbuing them with power and assertiveness. Similarly, this depiction of females denies them the expected spaces they ought to occupy in *Things Fall Apart* and *Waiting for Godot* where male characters are used to bring out female characters.

It is envisaged that Okonkwo's obsession with power, fame and mean behaviour towards men he perceives as weak and women which include wives and children, he terrorizes and beats up in feats of anger, Akingbe & Ogunyemi (2017) use Butler's notion of performative identity to argue that a careful reading shows that the women in *Things Fall Apart* do not just play the role of childbearing and raising. The duo notes that Ekwefi, Ezinma, Chielo, Ojuigo and some of the nine wives of Nwakibie are shown as performing acts of social and "economic independence concomitant of the traditional Igbo society ...such [that] the relationship between a man and his wife is complimentary to the extent that while men grow yam, the women grow cocoyam and cassava" (p. 84) in a supportive co-existence. In dismissing the popular belief that women in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* are forever subservient to the whims and caprices of their husbands, Akingbe & Ogunyemi (2017) highlight the assertive performative actions by Ekwefi and Chielo, the Agbala priestess, who directly or indirectly "take decisions at a critical period when a situation for such arises" (p. 85). Achebe could have created a male character to play the powerful role Chielo plays in the novel (Akingbe and Ogunyemi, 2017). Based on the assumptions of Akingbe & Ogunyemi (2017), the present paper analyses the acts of

performativity of masculinity and the gender-crossing macho acts by Ezinma together with a few other female characters which Okonkwo simultaneously distastes and admires.

Ironically, Lubungu & Siame (2023) analyse Samuel Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot* from the gender perspective which is anchored on homo-eroticism. The study shows that Beckett's misogynistic display in the play is couched in his creation of a world of homosexuality in *Waiting for Godot*. Beckett's presentation of male characters only creates a world where men resort to unnatural acts as encapsulated in the characters Vladimir and Estragon. This finding counters Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* where female characters are present in the text although they are denied the feminine spaces. The paper further reveals that the absence of female characters in *Waiting for Godot* enslaves man to a meaningless life. In Adamic terms, man's life is meaningless without a bone of his bone or flesh of his flesh (woman). The absence of women facilitates the futility of man's existence like the two tramps – Vladimir and Estragon in *Waiting for Godot* who continue to wait for Godot who never comes. There is no meaning in their lives because they do not take any action except waiting for Godot. It can be argued that *Waiting for Godot* is like a prison where you find men only who resort to gayism and sagging. Vladimir and Estragon are imprisoned by inertia. The study adds that the presence of male characters discounts the Biblical concept of procreation and ultimately creates uncertainty in a world of males only. Therefore, Beckett's avoidance of female characters propagates a world of gender imbalance, hence subjecting men to a meaningless existence.

Several literary scholars have reviewed Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot* and various views have been put across especially about the nature of characters Beckett features in the play. Some scholars have argued that Beckett did not feel that women needed to be portrayed in *Waiting for Godot* because the subject matter is outside what was considered the female sphere at the time (Lyons, 1990). Other scholars like Brayden (1993) argue that it seems fitting to conclude that Beckett's fiction may be problematic for feminists in that it shamelessly propagates negative stereotypes. It can further be argued that the passivity of waiting that defines the male characters' existences is a trait we might associate with the woman. Under the narrative of patriarchy, the woman is the inactive other to the emphatic male. It may be considered, therefore, that the male characters in *Waiting for Godot* embody both hegemonic masculinity and feminine traits, serving to portray a human condition rather than an exclusively male one. Butler (2006) defines hegemonic masculinity as simply the configuration of gender practices which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees the dominant position of men and the subordination of women.

It is envisaged that some scholars have labelled Beckett a misogynist. According to Holland (2006), the term misogynistic refers to hatred, dislike, mistrust of women, or a strong prejudice against women. It refers to a belief that men are generally better than women. Knowlson (2004) writes that Beckett argued that it would be impossible for a woman to accurately portray the character of Vladimir, who suffers from prostate problems because he frequently needs to urinate which is a condition associated with men. Despite his argument, the judge viewed that, since the play was about the human condition in general, it could be played by men or women, a verdict that made Beckett to call for a ban on all further productions of his plays in the Netherlands (Knowlson, 2004).

3. Theoretical Locale

This paper is underpinned by a phenomenological approach. The main proponent of this theory Husserl (1963) defines phenomenology as the descriptive, non-reductive science of whatever appears,

| | |
|-----------|--|
| 11 | ISSN 2349-7793 (online), Published by INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH IN COMMERCE, IT, ENGINEERING AND SOCIAL SCIENCES, under Volume: 18 Issue: 03 in March-2024 https://www.gejournal.net/index.php/IJRCIESS |
| | Copyright (c) 2024 Author (s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY). To view a copy of this license, visit https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/ |

in the manner of its appearing. This phenomenon can be in the subjective and inter-subjective life of consciousness. According to the Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy (2013), “The discipline of phenomenology may be defined initially as the study of structures of experience, of consciousness. Phenomenology is the study of “phenomena”; appearances of things, or things as they appear in our experience, or the ways we experience things, thus the meanings things have in our experience. Phenomenology studies conscious experience as experienced from the subjective or first person point of view”. This theoretical underpinning is immense and befitting in this study because this is the exact expectation of interpretations of the prevailing phenomena concerning feminist spaces in ‘Things Fall Apart’ and ‘Waiting For Godot’. Husserl (1963) postulates that the intentional theory of consciousness proposes that ‘being’ and ‘meaning’ are immersed in each other. Therefore, the phenomenological approach or theory emphasises a fundamental reading of the literary work without any effect from the outside. This is in tandem with the topic under study which requires comparing the literary circumstances depicting feminist spaces in the two texts without pointing to the outside world.

The phenomenological approach first came into being in the early years of the 20th century. Phenomenological theories of literature regard the work of art as a mediator between the consciousness of the author and the reader. Phenomenology is the philosophical study of structures of experience and consciousness. The phenomenological approach originated in ancient times, but major works began with Husserl. Fochtmann (2008) states that the roots of phenomenology are found in the epoch of Plato, Socrates, and Aristotle as a philosophy of human existence. Eagleton (1983:55) indicates that the modern founder of phenomenology is the German Philosopher Husserl (1963) and says, “Husserl, like his philosopher predecessor Rene’ Descartes, started on his hunt for certainty by provisionally rejecting what he called the ‘natural attitude’ – the commonsensical person –the in-the-street belief that objects existed independently of ourselves in the external world and that our information about them was generally reliable. Such an attitude merely took the possibility of knowledge for granted, whereas it was this, precisely, which was in question.” It can be argued that feminist spaces in the two texts under discussion are taken for granted.

It is envisaged that Husserl (1963) is a serious, difficult, or often inaccessible thinker, yet his work exhibits extraordinary originality, range, depth, vitality, and relevance. His unique contribution to phenomenology was highly influential in twentieth-century European philosophy. It can be argued that Husserl’s phenomenology is not practical since there is really little place for language in his approach. However, Husserl’s celebrated pupil Heidegger (1982) transformed the theory to make it practical and applicable for the analysis of language matters such as feminist spaces in literature in the current paper and called it interpretive-hermeneutic phenomenology. The chosen theory is befitting in the present study on feminist spaces in literature where the perceived traditions in the two texts are expected to be interpreted based on the two chosen texts to fulfil Husserl’s proposed theory which advocates for ‘being’ and ‘meaning.’

4. Methodology

The research adopted the descriptive research design which was backed by the qualitative approach that favours non-numerical and subjective studies (Brink & Wood, 1998; Siame et al. 2023). Two literary texts were selected purposively as secondary and major sources of information. These texts are *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe and *Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Beckett. Patton (1990) opines that purposive sampling is the most common method of sampling in qualitative

| | |
|----|--|
| 12 | ISSN 2349-7793 (online), Published by INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH IN COMMERCE, IT, ENGINEERING AND SOCIAL SCIENCES, under Volume: 18 Issue: 03 in March-2024 https://www.gejournal.net/index.php/IJRCIESS |
| | Copyright (c) 2024 Author (s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY). To view a copy of this license, visit https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/ |

research where individuals, groups, and settings are considered for selection if they are ‘informant rich’. In the present study, women were purposively selected as they were considered as ‘informant rich’ in the two texts to depict how spaces are allotted to them.

Being a desktop research, document, or content analysis research methodology was adopted to justify the qualitative and descriptive objectives of collecting secondary data for this study (Chaleunvong, 2009). Each text was read intensively and extensively to identify related and varying characteristics regarding feminine spaces. Themes relevant to feminine spaces were identified in the two texts. Data were analysed thematically using descriptive, thematic, and analytical skills. Related themes were picked and compared to establish the relatedness of feminine spaces and some degree of variations. Using the notions of Mugenda & Mugenda (1999), data analysis for this study went hand in hand with data collection. The collected data for each theme were analysed before proceeding to the following theme. The following themes were identified and analysed: seclusion from masculine activities, male supremacy, oppression from self-expression, delayed marriages and sacrificial lambs.

5. Results and Discussion

From the onset, it is critical to realise that both *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe and *Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Beckett offer complex portrayals of women, though in significantly different contexts and with different narrative roles. *Things Fall Apart* explores the pre-colonial African Igbo society and the impact of European colonization while *Waiting for Godot* depicts a meaningless world after the world wars. Several themes emerge from the comparative analysis of the two texts which include among others:

5.1 Seclusion from Masculine Activities

In both works, women are depicted as marginalized and subordinate to men within their respective societies. In *Things Fall Apart*, Igbo women are confined to domestic roles and subjected to the authority of male figures. One aspect of the society depicted in the novel is the seclusion of women from certain activities traditionally seen as masculine. In the Igbo society portrayed in the book, there is a clear division of labor and roles based on gender. Men are primarily responsible for activities considered masculine, such as farming, hunting, governance, and decision-making within the community. On the other hand, women are expected to handle domestic tasks, take care of the family, and engage in activities deemed appropriate for women, like cooking, cleaning, and bearing and raising children. Women in this society are often excluded from participating in important decision-making processes and are marginalized in the public sphere. They have limited education opportunities and are generally not allowed to hold positions of power or authority. For instance, Okonkwo, the protagonist, embodies the traditional masculine values of strength, ambition, and authority. He is a successful farmer and wrestler and holds a high status in his community. However, he also holds traditional beliefs about gender roles, viewing his son Nwoye as weak and effeminate and deeming him unfit for masculine activities. This reflects the societal expectations and attitudes towards gender in the Igbo culture as depicted in the novel. The excerpts below show societal expectations in Igbo culture:

In Umofia, a man was always provided for by his clansmen and was expected to maintain a large and prosperous family. But Ikemefuna knew that he would never see his family again. Moreover, he knew that Okonkwo would not be the one to send him back. He knew that he would never return

| | |
|----|--|
| 13 | ISSN 2349-7793 (online), Published by INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH IN COMMERCE, IT, ENGINEERING AND SOCIAL SCIENCES., under Volume: 18 Issue: 03 in March-2024 https://www.gejournal.net/index.php/IJRCIESS |
| | Copyright (c) 2024 Author (s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY). To view a copy of this license, visit https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/ |

to his people and that he would not be able to avenge his father. He did not know that it was his last day with his father's people.

The above excerpt reflects the idea that men were the primary providers and decision-makers in Igbo society. Ikemefuna, a boy who was taken into the village, realizes he will never see his family again and won't have a say in his fate. Another demonstration of the seclusion of women from masculine activities is seen in the following excerpt:

The men of Umofia and their sons who had joined them were all gathered in the obi (the living quarters of the head of the family). It was a small, low structure, rarely built to accommodate more than one wife and her children. On a fire in the center of the obi, a pot of palm wine was boiling. Okonkwo and the other leaders were given seats on the ground before it, while the other villagers huddled together in the obi.

This passage illustrates the gender-based segregation of roles and spaces. Men gather in the obi, the central place of power and decision-making, while women typically have separate quarters. This segregation of spaces is a reflection of the division of gender roles in Igbo society. The finding resonates well with Chilala (2019) who opines that the male domination in these spaces provides them the contexts and pre-texts to marginalize females by pushing them to the periphery of society. Equally, the excerpt below in *Things Fall Apart*: “Men of Umofia had followed the effeminate and cowardly Mbaino for too long. Our fathers and brothers and we have all been shamed. It is against our custom, and we are warned that it is against the custom of great men of other clans. We must root out this evil. And if our brothers take up our cause, we shall act like men and kill the men of Mbaino. We shall establish a peaceful and prosperous clan where men and women, sons and daughters, can live in unity and peace. Then we shall rejoice”, highlights the expectation that men are the ones who must take action, make decisions, and defend the honor of the clan, Women's roles are traditionally seen as less significant in these matters, reinforcing the seclusion of women from masculine activities. Similarly, in *Waiting for Godot*, the character of Lucky's wife is relegated to an unseen, voiceless existence, serving the needs of male characters without the agency of her own. This finding is in tune with Lubungu & Siame's (2023) observation that the avoidance of female characters in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* propagates a world of gender imbalance.

In *Waiting for Godot*, the female presence is absent, and the interactions are primarily between Vladimir and Estragon, highlighting a male-centric world. This absence can be seen as symbolic of a broader societal construct where women were historically excluded or marginalized from certain activities or roles. It can be argued that the lack of female characters and their exclusion from the narrative reflects the traditional gender roles prevalent during the time the play was written. Women were often excluded from certain spheres of life, including those traditionally deemed as masculine activities. Some scholars have argued that although there are no explicit references to the seclusion of women from masculine activities in *Waiting for Godot*, the absence of women in the play can be seen as a commentary on the traditional gender roles of the time. Beckett's decision to exclude female characters may suggest the confinement of women to certain societal roles, which excluded them from participating in the kinds of activities and dialogues represented by the male characters. This finding seems to agree with Knowlson's (2004) argument that it would be impossible for a woman to accurately portray the character of Vladimir, who suffers from prostate problems because he

frequently needs to urinate, a condition associated with men. The play may serve as a microcosm of a society where gender roles are clearly defined and enforced. To support this interpretation, one could reference the absence of female characters and the focus on Vladimir and Estragon's dialogue throughout the play. For instance, in Act I, Estragon expresses their desire for companionship: "People are bloody ignorant apes." This line can be interpreted to reflect a broader sentiment of loneliness and a desire for connection, which is a theme applicable to both genders but expressed through male characters in this particular play.

5.2 Male Supremacy

The theme of male supremacy is prevalent in both *Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Beckett and *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe, albeit in different contexts and with varying degrees of explicitness. Both works explore the dynamics of power and control within patriarchal societies, shedding light on the consequences of male dominance for both men and women. In *Waiting for Godot*, the absence of women on stage highlights the pervasive nature of male supremacy within the existential world of the play. The characters of Vladimir and Estragon are locked in a cycle of dependency and power struggle, where their interactions are characterized by dominance and submission. Vladimir is often seen as the more dominant and controlling of the two main characters. He frequently takes the lead, initiates actions, and gives orders. This can be interpreted as a reflection of traditional gender dynamics in which men are expected to be in control. Estragon, on the other hand, is more submissive and obedient. He follows Vladimir's lead and often seems to lack agency. This passivity could be seen as reinforcing traditional gender roles in which men are expected to be assertive and women submissive. Equally, Godot is often interpreted as a symbol of an authoritative figure or deity. The act of waiting for Godot can be seen as a reflection of how people often wait for someone in a position of power to provide guidance or meaning in their lives. The boy who comes to deliver messages from Godot is another character that some have interpreted as reflecting male authority. He represents a messenger of an unseen, powerful figure who commands respect and obedience. The presence of Lucky's wife, who is never seen but is referred to as a voiceless, oppressed figure, serves as a symbolic representation of the marginalized position of women within patriarchal systems. Beckett's portrayal underscores the absurdity and futility of male dominance, suggesting that it ultimately leads to a sense of existential emptiness and despair.

On the other hand, *Things Fall Apart* provides a more explicit examination of male supremacy within the context of Igbo society in Nigeria. The protagonist, Okonkwo, embodies the ideals of masculinity and strength, dominating his household and community through fear and violence. Women in the novel are relegated to subordinate roles, expected to obey the dictates of men and fulfill traditional gender roles. Achebe's portrayal highlights the destructive consequences of unchecked male supremacy, as Okonkwo's rigid adherence to patriarchal values ultimately leads to his downfall and the destabilization of his community. In the novel, women are expected to be submissive to men, particularly their husbands, and have limited decision-making power. Okonkwo's treatment of his wives, particularly his harsh treatment of his first wife, is an example of male dominance par excellence. Male authority and the brutal enforcement of societal norms are also seen in Okonkwo's participation in the killing of Ikemefuna, a boy who was taken as a hostage and lived with Okonkwo's family, demonstrating his commitment to traditional customs and his desire to maintain his reputation and standing within the community. As far as the leadership and decision-making structure within the Igbo community is concerned, it is primarily male-dominated. The Council of Elders, a significant

governing body, consists only of men who hold considerable power and influence over the community's affairs. Women are excluded from these positions of authority as Chilala (2019) has observed. Even the title system in Igbo society is hierarchical and based on achievements and recognition. It heavily favours men, allowing them to attain higher titles and social status, reinforcing the patriarchal structure of society. Further, there are not only proverbs and sayings that reinforce the traditional gender roles and the perceived superiority of men but also polygamy, a sign of wealth and social status among the Igbo. For instance, the excerpt "There was a wealthy man in Okonkwo's village who had three huge barns, nine wives and thirty children" (Achebe, 15) demonstrates that women are constructed as objects that are equal to the subject's (man) property, the more wives, that means more property, so greater the wealth! This practice, as observed by Roy (2021) that polygamy is completely honorable for a man, reinforces the idea that men are expected to have multiple wives and that women are expected to accept this. As for the proverbs, they often emphasize the strength, valor, and authority associated with masculinity

5.3 *Oppression from Self-expression*

Women in both texts experience limited agency and voice. In *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe, the theme of women's oppression from self-expression is a central aspect of the narrative, reflecting the patriarchal structure of Igbo society and the limited agency afforded to women within that framework. Through the characters of Ezinma, Ekwefi, and other women in the novel, Achebe illustrates how women are marginalized, silenced, and denied the opportunity to fully express themselves, and as Strong-Leek (2001) observes, characters such as Ekwefi, Enzima, and Ojiugo endure beatings and other forms of oppression such as self-expression. For instance, despite her intelligence, resilience, and strong spirit, Ezinma's potential for self-expression is constrained by the societal expectations placed upon her as a woman. She is denied the opportunity to pursue her desires and interests, instead expected to fulfill traditional gender roles and conform to the dictates of her father and husband-to-be. Despite her agency and resilience, Ezinma's ability to express herself freely is limited by the patriarchal norms that govern her society.

Similarly, Ezinma's mother, Ekwefi, also experiences oppression from self-expression within Igbo society. Ekwefi's personal history is marked by tragedy and loss, including the deaths of many of her children in infancy. Despite her grief and anguish, Ekwefi is expected to maintain a façade of stoicism and resilience, suppressing her emotions and denying herself the opportunity to openly mourn her losses. Her ability to express herself authentically is further constrained by her status as a woman and her subordinate position within the household. This finding resonates well with Dar et al., (2017) submission that women in *Things Fall Apart* are generally suppressed, humiliated, and often subjected to inhumane treatment being totally dependent on men. Furthermore, the practice of polygamy in Igbo society serves as another example of women's oppression from self-expression in the novel. Women like Ekwefi are forced to compete for the affection and attention of their husbands, while also contending with the jealousy and animosity of co-wives. This dynamic reinforces the subordinate position of women within the patriarchal hierarchy and restricts their ability to assert themselves or challenge the status quo. It can, therefore, be inferred that *Things Fall Apart* provides a powerful exploration of women's oppression from self-expression within the context of Igbo society. Through the experiences of characters like Ezinma and Ekwefi, Achebe highlights how patriarchal norms and cultural expectations limit women's agency and autonomy, denying them the opportunity to fully express themselves and shape their destinies.

Likewise, in *Waiting for Godot*, the absence of female characters on stage underscores their lack of voice and presence within the male-dominated world of the play. Pozzo's treatment of Lucky, his slave or servant, for instance, can be viewed as an allegory for power dynamics and subjugation. This relationship could symbolize the historic oppression and control of women by powerful figures in society while the lack of meaningful communication or dialogue among the characters could be symbolic of the historical silencing and marginalization of women's voices in patriarchal societies. In Act II, Pozzo refers to the boy he is with as "my messenger," and mentions that the boy's brother "was more intelligent than you." This reference to a male messenger being more intelligent could be interpreted as an indirect commentary on gender bias and the societal perception of men being superior to women. Perhaps this justifies Lyons's (1990) argument that Beckett did not feel that women needed to be portrayed in *Waiting for Godot* because the subject matter is outside what was considered the female sphere at the time. We also see the characters Vladimir and Estragon spend the entire play waiting for the arrival of Godot, who never comes. This waiting and suffering can be viewed as symbolic of the passive roles that society sometimes imposes on women, where they are expected to wait for something to happen rather than taking active roles in shaping their destinies.

5.4 *Delayed Marriages*

The theme of delayed marriages is explored in both *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe and *Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Beckett, albeit in different contexts and with different implications for the characters involved. In each work, delayed marriages serve as a narrative device that reflects broader societal norms and expectations, as well as the individual struggles of the characters to navigate their respective worlds. In *Things Fall Apart*, the practice of delayed marriages is deeply ingrained within Igbo culture and tradition. Young men and women are expected to undergo a series of rituals and ceremonies before they are deemed ready for marriage. For example, Okonkwo's daughter, Ezinma, experiences a delay in her marriage to her suitor, because her father wants to ensure that she is properly prepared and that the appropriate bride price is negotiated. This delay underscores the importance placed on marriage within Igbo society, as well as the significant role that familial and communal approval play in the process.

Similarly, in *Waiting for Godot*, the characters of Vladimir and Estragon are caught in a state of perpetual waiting, which can be interpreted as a metaphor for the existential condition of human beings. Throughout the play, they discuss the possibility of leaving and finding something better, yet they remain rooted in their present circumstances, unable or unwilling to take decisive action. This delay in their journey or progress can be seen as symbolic of a delayed "marriage" to their own lives or destinies, as they grapple with questions of purpose, meaning, and identity.

Despite the differences in cultural and narrative context between the two works, the theme of delayed marriages serves as a point of connection, highlighting how societal expectations and individual desires intersect and sometimes conflict. Whether it is the delayed marriage of a young woman in Igbo society or the metaphorical delay in the characters' engagement with their own lives in Beckett's play, both "Things Fall Apart" and "Waiting for Godot" offer insights into the complexities of human relationships and the search for fulfillment and meaning in a world marked by uncertainty and change.

5.5 *Sacrificial Lambs*

| | |
|-----------|--|
| 17 | ISSN 2349-7793 (online), Published by INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH IN COMMERCE, IT, ENGINEERING AND SOCIAL SCIENCES, under Volume: 18 Issue: 03 in March-2024 https://www.gejournal.net/index.php/IJRCIESS |
| | Copyright (c) 2024 Author (s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY). To view a copy of this license, visit https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/ |

In both *Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Beckett and *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe, the theme of women being treated as sacrificial lambs is evident, albeit in distinct ways that reflect the cultural and narrative contexts of each work. In *Waiting for Godot*, the absence of female characters on stage is notable. Women are mentioned in passing, such as Lucky's wife, who is portrayed as a voiceless and marginalized figure. She is referred to as a burden, subjected to the whims and demands of the male characters. Although she never appears, her presence looms large as a symbol of the oppression and exploitation of women within patriarchal societies. Furthermore, the character of Pozzo's slave, who is also referred to as a woman, serves as another example of women being treated as sacrificial lambs. She is subjected to physical abuse and exploitation, highlighting the dehumanizing effects of patriarchal power dynamics.

In *Things Fall Apart*, the theme of women being treated as sacrificial lambs is explored within the context of Igbo society in Nigeria. Female characters such as Ezinma and Ekwefi are subjected to the expectations and demands of male authority figures, particularly Okonkwo. Ekwefi, for example, suffers through multiple childbirths, with several of her children dying in infancy, highlighting the physical and emotional toll of her sacrificial role as a mother. Additionally, the practice of bride price, where women are exchanged as commodities between families, underscores the objectification and devaluation of women within the traditional Igbo social structure.

In both works, women are depicted as sacrificial lambs, sacrificed to uphold patriarchal power structures and societal norms. Their voices are silenced, their agency denied, and their bodies commodified for the benefit of men. Through the portrayal of these women, both Beckett and Achebe shine a light on the pervasive and destructive effects of gender inequality and the need for greater empathy, understanding, and equality in human relationships.

Conclusion

The study concludes that there are more similarities than variations in how females are portrayed in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. One of the similarities between the two texts is that there are some female spaces in the texts. Some of the notable similarities in the two texts include seclusion from male activities, inferiority complex, oppression from self-expression, hindrance or delayed marriages, and being used as sacrificial lambs. On the other hand, Achebe uses real female characters while Beckett portrays female characteristics through males. The portrayal of women as weaker vessels in both texts is an act of male supremacy which should be discouraged in today's societies so that enough females are given literary spaces.

References

- Achebe, C. (1958). *Things Fall Apart*. Heinemann Educational Publishers.
- Akingbe, N. & Ogunyemi, C.B. (2017). Countering Masculinity: Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and the Rise of Feminist Assertiveness in the Novels of Nigerian female writers. *Studia Universitatis Petru Maior – Philologia*, no. 22, 81–93.
- Alzuabi, F. (2012). Female Solidarity against Oppression in Achebe's 'Things Fall Apart' and Naylor's 'The Women of Brewster Palace' (MA Thesis). Yarmouk University.

- Beckett, S. (1952). *Waiting for Godot*. Faber and Faber.
- Beckett, S. (1982). *Waiting for Godot*. Grove Press.
- Bloom, H. (1987). *Modern Critical Interpretations: Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot*. Chelsea House Publishers.
- Bryden, M. (1933). *Women in Samuel Beckett's Prose and Drama*. Macmillan Press.
- Butler, C. (1993). "Homoeroticism and the Possibility of a Non-heterosexual Reading of *Waiting for Godot*." *Modern Drama*, Vol.36, no.1, pp.42-53.
- Butler, J. (1988). Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory. *Theatre Journal*, 40 (4): 519-531.
- Chilala, C. (2019). Gendered Spaces in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*: Text, context and pretext. In F. Banda (ed), *Theoretical and Applied Aspects of African Languages and Culture*. Festschrift in honour of Professor Mildred Nkolola-Wakumelo, pp, 317-339. Cape Town: Centre for Advanced Studies of African Society.
- Dar, I., Nasir,S., & Thontya, M.D. (2017). Gender Stratification in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. *New Horizons*, 11(2), 17-32
- Esslin, M. (1961). *The Theatre of the Absurd*. Methuen Publishing Limited.
- Holland, J. (2006). *Misogyny: The World's Oldest Prejudice*. Oxford University Press.
- Knowlson, J. (1996). *Damned to Fame: The life of Samuel Beckett*. Bloomsbury, 1996.
- Linda, B. (1990). *Women in Beckett: Performance and Critical Perspectives*. University of Illinois Press.
- Lubbungu, J. & Siame, P. (2023). The Beckettian Space in *Waiting for Godot*: A World of Homosexuality. In Kaur, G. (ed). *Recent Trends in Contemporary Literature in English*. Authors Press. Pp 135-140
- Fletcher, J. (1999). "Closet Dramas: Samuel Beckett and Homosexual Representation." *Gay and Lesbian Literature since World War II: History and Memory*, edited by J. Rickard, Harrington Park Press, pp. 89-103.
- Goffman. E. (1959). *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. University of Edinburgh Social Sciences Research Centre: Anchor Books.
- Hassan, A.M. (2016). The Image of Women in Chinua Achebe's Novel 'Things Fall Apart'. *Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences*, 1: 1-6.