

Socio -Cultural Conflicts and Language: A Study of Chinua Achebe's Arrow of God

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ABSTRACT

Chinua Achebe (1930-2013), an Igbo writer in English, is one of the Africa's most acclaimed authors and the pioneers in the portrayal of African life from the African perspectives. Chinua Achebe's third novel, Arrow of God, is concerned with the theme of conflict.

The paper examines the issues of Nigerian Igbo socio –cultural identity and other linguistic features that coalesce to communicate the intended message in Achebe's Arrow of God (1964).It highlights Achebe's adaptive use of the English language to capture peculiar cultural ideals in the Igbo traditional society. The study analysesand portrays the vocabulary, syntax and expressions that depict socio-cultural Igbo norms.

The paper introspects the internal tribal conflicts making the fertile ground for the disintegration of the tribe. The political and religious powers mirror the discourse of their ethnicity. Ezeulu, the central character of the novel tries to hold the community unified by his thoughtful decisions, but the social aggression is seen to challenge the traditional religious ethos.

Achebe sketches cultural patterns in social institutions to counter stereotypes of Africa. However, even as he traces these patterns, he reveals schisms in Igbo society that foreshadow change in the existing social order. Colonialism fractures the society further, accelerating change. While delineating the processes of change, Achebe outlines the complex nature of cultural identity, a result of both the intrinsic nature of Igbo society and the advent of colonialism.

KEY WORDS

Arrow of God, Socio-cultural conflicts, language, themes

INTRODUCTION

Chinua Achebe's novel *Arrow of God* was published in 1964. It is a political, social and cultural novel that is set in a country in Africa: Nigeria. It is a fictional book that tells the real life story of Nigeria and its fight to keep their beliefs and culture while the British invade. Slowly, Nigeria's culture disintegrates and reorients itself to Western culture and Christian values. Its main character, Ezeulu, is the chief priest of Ulu, the god created by the people of Umuaro. They created this god to rule over the other individual gods during a time of crisis. As the chief priest, Ezeulu takes on the responsibility to fight for his religious authority. This is Achebe's third novel after his books *No Longer at Ease* and *Things Fall Apart*. These three books together are often referred to as the African Trilogy. This book was published as part of the prominent Heinemann African Writers Series.

The phrase "Arrow of God" comes from the Igbo proverb when a person or sometimes even an event, are said to embody the image of God. The title "Arrow of God" exemplifies Ezeulu as the arrow in the bow of his god. *Arrow of God* was the first ever novel to win the Jock Campbell New Statesmen Prize for African writing. *Arrow of God* is Achebe's perfect work of art; Ezeulu is his best portrayed hero and the most remarkable. The work demonstrates Achebe's skillful at its most unexpected, most difficult and generally defiant. The second being that Ezeulu is Achebe's best acknowledged legend inside the setting of his initial town books, where character and history are inseparable. Thus, Echeruo summarizes its merits in these words "Arrow of God, a much denser and more technically sophisticated novel than the two earlier novels, tells three stories in one integrated style: the trial of Ezeulu, the disintegration of the indigenous political and religious order in Umuaro, and the establishment of British rule and Christian religion."

One of the profound and critical readings of Chinua Achebe's third novel, *Arrow of God*. (1964) reveals the existence of conflicts at various levels and dimensions. O. R. Dathorne, a renowned critic of African literature agrees that, "**Arrow of God**" is built on conflicts." According to him: Because of the psychological problems that Achebe poses through the relationship between Ezeulu, his god (Ulu), his community and the District Officer, *Arrow of God* is his most ambitious novel. The author attempts to remain detached from the forces in conflict. Spare and powerful, *Arrow of God* is an unforgettable portrayal of the loss of faith, and the struggle between tradition and change. Continuing the epic saga of the community in *Things Fall Apart*, it is the second volume of Achebe's African trilogy, and is followed by *No Longer at Ease*.

Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God* examines the pragmatic implications of the speech acts employed and their relevance for promoting leadership in the contemporary society as it has been observed that the century has witnessed a great deal of leadership crisis especially in Nigeria.

The exploration of certain portions of *Arrow of God* is a call for appropriate acts in the socio-political sphere in Nigeria and all over world.

THE NOVEL IN BRIEF

Arrow of God (1964) represents the struggle for power and authority between the African and the missionaries and in the Igbo extended family. The identity issue comes from an Igbo proverb wherein an occasion or a person is stated to symbolize the will of God. The identity issues are continued by way of Achebe as the sequel to the troubles meditated in *Things Fall Apart* (1958) for the duration of the colonial strength. He points out the continuity of African cultural disruption with the equal insight and involvement inside the 1920s after the arrival of the missionaries in Nigeria. The bygone Igbo tradition is depicted through the appealing mode of narration with the diverse alternate in African subculture due to new faith like Christianity, elevating the troubles of identity amongst Igbo network.

The major conflicts identified in the novel include: The communal land conflict between Okperi and Umuaro; a conflict that eventually culminated to full scale war between the two towns; the conflict between Ezeulu, the Chief Priest of Ulu, and his erstwhile white friend, Captain Winterbottom. This particular conflict gives rise to the conflict between Ezeulu and his people in general and the conflict between Ezeulu and Ezidemili in particular, personified in Nwaka as the spokesman of Ezidemili. There is yet a terrible conflict between Ezeulu and his god, Ulu, as the two seem to be working in diametrically opposing directions and cross purposes.

Achebe's *Arrow of God* is partially to challenges the Whiteman's claim and to protest against the destruction of Africa's peaceful life hampered by colonialism. It is also in line with this 'protest' that other novels like *Things Fall Apart*, *No Longer at Ease*, *A Man of the People* were written to demonstrate how Europe confounded Africa during colonization, correct the distortion about West African cultures, recreate the past in the present in order to educate the West African reader and give him the confidence in his cultural heritage, and also in order to educate the foreign reader and help him to get rid of the false impressions about the West African cultures acquired for centuries of cultural.

Emenyeonu (2004) opines that Achebe is a moralist whose concern for his society goes beyond the issue of change. As the voice of black continent, Achebe has clearly brought out the major burden of the black

man with regards to his colonial experience and the postcolonial quest for asserting Africa's humanity and self realization.

The expositions and discussions would reveal one of the relevance of Arrow of God as a novel
That contains a universal truth of conflicts in the individual, homes, states, churches and nations
As the bane of the modern society and a hydra headed monster that dwarfs growth and
Development and sometimes and ironically leads to developments.

ACHEBE'S DEPICTION OF SOCIO-CULTURAL CONFLICTS

Chinua Achebe, probably the black Africa's best known writer and has also been considered as the masterpiece of modern literature. Achebe has explored the problems of culture conflicts and social change in the context of both traditional and modern Africa. Two of his novels Things Fall Apart (1958) and Arrow of God (1966), concern the coming of the white man and the disintegration of the white Igbo life. Although Arrow of God (1964), comes after No Longer at Ease (1960), it may be viewed both in its theme and in its presentation of the crisis in Ibo society as an extension of Things Fall Apart, It renders the cultural situation with greater psychological complexity and dramatic intensity. In fact, the action of Arrow of God takes place around the early 1920's when the colonial rule of the British' over Nigeria had been well established and the Ibo society had passed from the stage of confrontation and survival into one of self-adaptation within the new order characterized by altered social values. While projecting a vividly peopled landscape, Achebe probes deeper into the inner contradictions of proffer, status and hierarchy which the colonial rule brings to the fore in the Ibo community.

The social identity of pre-colonial and colonial Igbo people is reflected through the conflicts between continuity and change in the social patterns. The resistance of Igbo to colonial power through their culture, customs and traditional patterns is the manifestation of the problematic relationship of two powers. The social identity of Igbo people is filtered through the belongingness and the different social layers of the customs. The dispute on the land ownership between Umuaro and Okperi reveals an internal crisis of the social and political knots of the tribe. Umuaro villagers decide to send an emissary to Okperi to resolve the matter either by peace or war. Ezeulu, the Chief Priest of the Ulu resist them by saying; "I know", He told them, "my father said this to me that when our village first came here to live the land belonged to Okperi. It was Okperi, who gave us a piece of their land to live in" Arrow of God But Nwaka, one of the 'titled' men of Umuaro convinces the people that the Okperi people were the wanderers and they were driven by the people of Umuofia, Abame and Aninta respectively.

The issues of socio-cultural conflict of the Igbo become the stepping stone for the missionaries to disrupt the traditional patterns of the society. Ezeulu sends his son Oduche as a spy to know the Christian ideology to protect the identity of the Umuaro Igbo people when he comes to know the possible results of the changing tribal social patterns. The missionaries disrupted the culture of the Igbo people by trade and converted some of them to Christianity. Achebe puts in the intention of Ezeulu;

“I want one of my sons to join these people and be my eye there. If there is nothing in it you will come back. But if there is something there you will bring home my share” (AOG: 51).

It is evident from the novel that the issues of social identity are explored through the internal and external conflicts in Nigeria.

Arrow of God presents a society in the throes of historical experience. The Ibo society is presented in its emergence into a reality which demands a meaningful self-differentiation and a recovery of self-confidence on the part of its members. The action of Arrow of God is involved in the flux of time, and its protagonist is trapped in the irreversible duality of a cultural environment in transition. Achebe explores the dilemma of the Ibo people mainly through the ordeal of the self undergone by Ezeulu, the Chief Priest of Ulu. The shifts in the social milieu are dramatized through the psychological conflict in the personality of Ezeulu. "Consequently, Arrow of God offers an inside view of Ibo culture, from the point of view of the central consciousness of a representative individual whose actions and fortunes constitute the pattern of tribal destiny.

USAGE OF LANGUAGE IN ARROW OF GOD

The usage of language in Achebe's Arrow of God depicts the Igbo cultural affects and presuppositions in English. He aptly makes use of the English Language to explicate ideas, occasions, troubles which can be peculiar to the Igbo society and which painting the socio-cultural placing. To portray the Igbo cultural setting and ideals, Palmen (1979:seventy six) observes that Achebe is rural characters who would generally use Igbo in real conditions are made to speak in English but the English has been changed to mirror an African rural network and the concept styles of native Igbo speaks. It is obvious that language and the society entwine. In Arrow of God, the interaction of language and the Igbo society represents Achebe's adaptive use of the English language. Achebe, quite simply, readjusts and modifies the English language to in shape the cultural norms, social interactions, ideas and beliefs of the conventional Igbo society in Arrow of God.

The novel Arrow of God is an understanding tale of conflicts, power and leadership. The conflict is portrayed in this paperwork: the struggle between the Igbo traditional schigim and Christianity; the war

among the white administration and the Igbo traditional authority the conflict among Umuaro and Okperi; the conflict between Ezeulu and his Chief rival Nwaka and the internal battle inside the protagonist “Ezeulu”. Jabbi (1980:142) remarks that the dramatic conflict and action within the novel are always knowledgeable by two primary concerns. The philosophic difficulty pertains to the overall quality of Ezeulu’s private apprehension of the maximum purposes of the Utu priesthood. The second concerns the depth and consistency of his sensible adherence to the essential concepts and circumstantial dictates of an Ezeulu historic future. Achebe makes use of his extraordinary language to deliver this story of electricity, conflicts and leadership and their joint interplay with history and community..With these, there is, therefore, the need to adopt the functional discourse theory in the exposition.

His main purpose for ‘nativising’ the English language is to seize apparent peculiarities inside the Igbo traditional society. He lodges to the usage of proverbs, translation imageries to bring in his intentions, to give an explanation for Igbo ideals’ cultural norm/beliefs and to seize the Igbo traditional setting or surroundings. Achebe (1975:29) himself asserts: The African writer must target to use English in a way that brings his message out without altering the language to the volume that its price as a medium of global change can be lost.

MAJOR THEMES IN ARROW OF GOD

The conflict of cultures is a central theme in Arrow of God, and there is conflict everywhere; the religious factions are at odds with each other because they worship different deities. The villages of Umuaro and Okperi are in conflict over differing historical claims for property. The most dynamic clash of cultures however is between the local religious traditions and the Christian religion that has made its way into Umuaro. When the villagers realize that the Christian practices are more egalitarian and less restrictive than the worship of Ulu, Christianity wins them over marking the end of Ezeulu’s reign.

Chinua Achebe exemplifies the clash of socio-cultural themes advanced in his novel Arrow of God (1964). The Ibo land of Nigeria has now capitulated to the superior military firepower of the British colonial masters whose government is gaining strength, like their religion, Christianity. Ezeulu, the protagonist and Chief Priest of Ulu, is sensible enough to send his son Oduche to be his “eye and ear among those people” of the white man’s religion. The conflict created by that decision and his own friendly disposition to the white man based on his truthfulness eventually lead to the disruption of tradition first in the disrespectful attempt on the sacred python’s life by his son, Oduche, and then the backlash of attaining the admiration of Captain Winterbottom (who Nwaka of Umuaro, the articulate orator, pejoratively refers to as “a man of white body” whose leprous hands Ezeulu metaphorically shook.

Ezeulu is detained for two months in Okperi during which he cannot eat the ritual yams, the end of which signals the beginning of harvest. He is pitched against his angry and hungry people because he maintains that harvest cannot be made until he finishes eating the yams he missed while in Okperi. The consequent conflict gives way to a mass exodus to Christianity which offers a way out by asking people to harvest their crops, shun Ulu and its priest and bring offering to the Church. The fall of Ezeulu is a symbolic fall of traditional culture before the new European civilization. And thus, Africans cannot withstand colonialism and traditional religion loses to Christianity which becomes more strengthened at the end of the novel.

Arrow of God is an artistic denial of the colonial defilement of African values and tradition, the failure of the British in appreciating African values and the collapse of traditionalism before the triumphant jackboots of modernity typified by Western cultural and religious practices. Apart from the dominant theme of the clash of cultures and the eventual defeat of African religion by Christianity, Achebe passes across minor themes through his characters. Ezeulu arguably symbolizes truth (he witnessed against his people) and self-control (unlike Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart*, he has a remarkable control over his anger - "my friend, don't make me laugh" summarizes his suppression of his anger. He even tolerates his children). And for whatever his fault is, Ezeulu is a symbol of truth, native intelligence, pragmatism, self-control and tenacity.

A thorough thematic appraisal of *Arrow of God*, (which lies outside the scope of the present study) would reveal diverse lessons that the author intends to impart in his readers. Even Ezeulu's antagonist, the rumbustious, compulsive and admirable speaker, Nwaka, represents the power of oratory in making things happen. Characters like Oduche and the faceless corporal Matthew Nweke typify betrayal; Oduche, of his father; and "couple" Nweke, of African traditions. As a result, Christianity triumphs over traditional Umuaro religion.

CONCLUSION

Achebe's *Arrow of God* offers an intricate exploration of the socio-cultural conflicts of the people of Nigeria, the most populous country in Africa. He demonstrates the Nigerian social and cultural system that is represented through the ethnicity of the Igbo people. This paper emphasis on the conflicts of social, cultural and the influence of linguistic environment. He uses Igbo lexico-syntactic structures to translate his ideas into the English language. His language is natives and disciplined to capture Igbo cultural norms, ideas and ideals. Achebe remarks that the writer should be involved in the re-education and regeneration of his society if he must save humanity from total destruction. He expresses this idea in *Arrow of God* where he dwells on the society and the role of good leadership so as to enhance the life of the community. Apart from showing how colonialism has defrauded mankind, Achebe brings in this important theme of leadership in order to re-educate and re-generate his society. *Arrow of God* touches on Nigerian society as much as it does for the rest of black and other erstwhile colonized nations. Achebe balances both the opposing forces in the tribe as well as the forces of the European colonial institutions. He explores the external colonial power dominates the internal social system and the cultural patterns only when the foremost is permitted by the latter. Ezeulu's pride and the Nwaka's challenge to Ezeulu make the things different among Igbo people, subsequently the traditional cultural aspects of the Igbo people finds no place with the changing pace. The dual of 'title' between Ezeulu and Nwaka leads the confusion among people to follow the social order by the messages of their deities Ulu and Idemili to deal with the missionaries. Thus, Achebe's *Arrow of God* (1958) reflects the issues of socio- culture through internal tribal conflicts and the intervention of the missionaries to dislocate the Igbo people from their religious concerns and Culture that regulates the social order by keeping people vibrant about their social and individual identity, but the paper shows how cultural changes disrupt the social patterns and individual identity in mutual understanding of the people in the society or the clan.

"*Arrow of God* becomes the central volume in a trilogy of novel in which Achebe explores the colonial rule in one area of Nigeria".

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