

Exploring the shattered identity of Igbo community from Chinua Achebe's 'No Longer at Ease' and 'Arrow of God'

Tanbir Shahnawaz

Research Scholar
Department of English,
University of Gour Banga, Maheshmati, Roypara, Malda, India

Abstract: Different linguistic groups of the world determine the effectiveness and influence of their tongues and the studying about those speakers in a society will disclose their opinion of their own language and their reaction to other linguistic groups. One can trace the advancement and progression of a language through the way, the individuals interconnect with one another and with surrounding communities. This paper talks about the African writers who have contributed to recreating African uniqueness that promotes the awareness of a cultural and ethnic movement in the literary Renaissance of Africa. Chinua Achebe is one of the most well-known and renowned African literary figure. He has wrestled with the impact of hybridity, decolonisation, etymological, and movement during the postcolonial era in his novels. Achebe's attempt is to recreate the identity of his community. In the discussion of his works, the personal views and thoughts on identity and the others views on this particular matter as a postcolonial novelist is dealt. One can find it from his perspective in his stories, interviews and articles. The theme of post colonialism and its link with identity is briefed in this paper. How Achebe observes and views the identity of Igbo community on a personal level and the chief components that have an effect on identity like colonialism, hybridity, language and cultural change are briefly discussed through his works.

Index Terms—decolonisation, colonialism, hybridity, oeuvre, canon, longue durée, Igbo, Creole, leitmotif, jargon, polyglot.

I. INTRODUCTION

Literature has turned into an extraordinary choice for the beleaguered and oppressed individuals to express their sorrow, as it served as a 'beacon' and the actual source for 'exposure of rigid and maddening truths' that has been wolfing down their livelihood and happiness. The literature concerning to such theories and ideas were solidified in the glare of publicity during the beginning of 20th century. The literary expert and Nigerian patriot Chinua Achebe's involvement in showcasing the post-colonial issues from the streets of Nigeria into the dedication of intercontinental theme is quite immense.

There is an infinite number of possibilities in literature to change the world. The implication and subtlety of the languages in the world capture the adaptableness of man and corroborates that language is basically an elaborated form of communication that stays in a perpetual state of transformation. It discovers itself repetitively restructuring, acclimate to the changes, facing renaissance in a new-fangled land or suffering the obsolescence of a tongue that is gone astray.

The well written word has been brutally degraded in latest years as intellectuals have joined battle for the legitimacy of the writing. Achebe is one such writer who leaves no room for any argument as he puts pen to paper with deliberateness and intentionality and he is not the one who is scared to state his purposes and dedications. Achebe discloses the fact that his literary works are a thoughtful attempt to involve his culture and nation and his world-wide audience. He portrays himself as a postcolonial novelist who decides to loop his nationals and natives with his pen before he permits them to descend into stupidity or apathy. The thoughtful style that Achebe uses to write has received him an uplifting and awe-inspiring position in two fictitious canons: both the African and Western literary canons.

Bibliophiles and book lovers raise the value of the novel for its truthful depiction of Igbo land, its opulent profundity in symbolism, imagery and allegory, and its philosophical lessons about society and the merging of cultures. The cause for the scathing criticism of his work ascends from the point that his commitment to realism and objectivity lead him to write *Things Fall Apart* in the appropriating British dialect rather than trying to smear his novel in anti-African shades. Achebe retains a whole African perception and outlook in the novel, keep in mind, a leitmotif of his tribalism and making use of his own polyglot abilities by means of widespread jargon and lexis of the Igbo language.

His decision to write his novel in the English language has created countless debates, equally in African and non-African realms, over Achebe's commitment to his land of birth and his views about colonisation and imperialism.

"Our beliefs may be the factor motivating our behaviours, whatever the objective truth is" [1]

II. CHINUA ACHEBE- A MAN WHO GAVE AFRICA A VOICE

"We cannot trample upon the humanity of others without devaluing our own. The Igbo, always practical, put it concretely in their proverb *Onye ji onye n'ani ji onwe ya*: " He who will hold another down in the mud must stay in the mud to keep him down."

- Chinua Achebe

Social philosophy and ideas in, and social theorising and hypothesising about, Africa has mainly disregarded African literature. However, the workings of African novelists establish possible sources for the scrutiny of communal thoughts and beliefs and for building social theory and notions in the continent. Undeniably, African authors offer the types of comparison, abstractions, frameworks and acute reflections on the life of Africans and the home of the Africans in the comprehensive milieu in the *longue durée* – short of which it would be impossible to entirely reason for the nature of existence, reality and scope of knowledge in the African lives.

Scrutinising writers and societal thought in Africa also signifies a vital way of partaking in literary and social thinking on the rational antiquity of modern Africa. A technique of considering communal phenomenon from the outlook and standpoint of thought rather than that of deed. The patterns of thoughts and beliefs obvious in modern African literary writing have progressed ever since the late colonial era. Albeit one might still be able to distinguish major issues that run through modern African writing, there are some intellectual concerns or anxieties that give the impression of dominating specific eras. There are also the concerns of restricting the works of particular members of a generation to the crucial themes that originally animated the initial works of members of that generation.

To cite a few examples, if Achebe's social reflection is subjected to 'nationalism and cultural affirmation', it is obvious in *Things Fall Apart*, without doubt *A Man of the People* (1966) would set up a 'postcolonial condemnation of the recently independent state', whereas *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987) echoes Achebe's 'disillusionment', but definitely not 'disinterest' in the socio-political venture of modern Africa. Even less apparent trans-generational leitmotifs are Ngũgĩ's oeuvre, from *Weep Not Child* (1964) and *The River Between* (1965), to *Wizard of Crow* (2006).

This denotes, for that reason, is that in articulating and researching social phenomenon in African literary writing, although the greater native and international economic dynamics and socio political might unfavourably inform literature and the generation might not be as enlightening as hitherto presumed in exploring the collective thoughts and perception of African writers. The primary contemporary writer-social thinkers, together with Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Peter Abrahams, Naguib Mahfouz, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Mongo Beti, Ayi Kwei Armah, Camara Laye etc., were originally apprehensive about the revolution in modern Africa. Power and 'Culture' formed the pivot upon which the change and revolution revolved.

These writers arose in late colonial and abrupt postcolonial backgrounds of incongruous social, economic and political along with intellectual developments in which culture was a solemn controversy, predominantly in relation to the power on reconciling the past, with the extant, and gaining independence from racialism and colonial rule and racialism and winning the power, domesticating it to provide service for the people. A lot of these writers turned into social thinkers who provoked the practical and theoretical culture in relation to power and authority.

As a first step in his debut, Achebe bestowed the culture, religion and inland economies of an average Igbo lives a degree of humanity and intimacy that condensed their universal experiences, bravely shifting the confinements of perspective. According to Irele,

In the continent – and beyond. In this special issue, we are interested in writers whose intense engagements with the nature of existence and questions of knowledge are reflected in the interplay of critical perspectives marked by imagination and originality. Against this backdrop, we take for granted that 'both the imaginative and the ideological [are] closely associated' (Irele, 1981)

When he put out his first novel in 1958, his country, Nigeria was just two years away from freedom. It was a nation blessed with the financial promise of rich reserves of oil and culturally varied population. Although Achebe chose to begin with writing the past, he did with a realism that shunned romanticising and dared his readers to make out the existing truth – that people are still far away from retrieving what was lost, and are vulnerable of losing even more.

In the year 1964, his novel *Things Fall Apart* was the first novel to be set as an obligatory text in schools and institutes across the African countries that speak English and it is also the most widely read book for more than 50 years after publication; it was the book that had familiarised readers all over the world to the writing of the continent.

Elaine Showalter accredited him as a writer who "changed imperishably the way we see and understand the world".

Achebe further wrote four other novels among which, *No Longer at Ease* and *Arrow of God* voices the story of Okonkwo's progenies, projecting the fate of Nigeria. The works portrayed the landscape of Africa for many decades. It highlighted characters who struggled for a change and individuality. He also brought out the tradition and transformation, moral responsibility and exploitation with his writing. Africans were requesting a newly independent nation on a major human scale. With style that takes the English language and bathes it with nuances and a history that is distinctively Igbo, noticeably Nigerian and unquestionably African, Achebe's writings are a realism that confirms the lasting significance of his fiction.

III. PROVISION OF IDENTITY TO IGBO PEOPLE – NO LONGER AT EASE.

Achebe's novel *No Longer at Ease* that was published in 1958 has references to the application of inter-textual theory to postcolonial literature. This literature won the Nigerian National Trophy. It narrates the story of Obi Okonkwo, a Nigerian man who fights with cultural identity and fidelity. He relates it with the matters related to colonialism, nationalism, self-identity and conflicts. The story focuses on the life of a young man and his association with African roots that had gone astray. All the way through the novel, the writer highlights the themes of struggle and conflict. The tussle outspreads from Obi's personal insights on what is true and erroneous, but also discourses the struggle that occurs within the Nigeria. It is set in modern Nigeria, during the days afore Independence. The hero of the story is Obi Okonkwo who is the grandson of Okonkwo from *Things Fall Apart* (1958).

T.S. Eliot's poem *The Journey of the Magi* (1927) is the origin for the title of his novel *No Longer At Ease*. This poem described in the perception of the Magi, the storyteller who wanders in search of peace but in the end he decides that the home is the worst place to find peace and his faith in religion is lost, everything around him makes alien and he desires the death.

The mainstay Obi passes his time in his native as well as in Europe. He was raised in Nigeria, a nation state that has seen the spreading of colonialism and mixing of other traditions with the traditions of natives in Nigeria.

T. S. Eliot's notion to elucidate 'But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation' is alike to the protagonist in the novel. When he is jammed between the cultures and beliefs, he finds no solace and security in his own society. He experiences a logical and cultural birth that is more likely considered as a death in his journey from Umuofia, his village to England. On his return, Obi feels socially dislocated. He is 'no longer at ease' with his natives' religion, people, and their lifestyle. It accounts Obi's social, professional, social and ethical failure after returning from England to Nigeria.

This book portrays the third realm in an exceptional perspective. The author writing the novel dealt with much conflict in his life, and this conflict of identity, country and nationalism is shared through the eyes of the main character, Obi Okonkwo. The main plot begins with Obi's return to Nigeria after completing his bachelor degree. He is strong-minded in eradicating corruption from his country and creating a new nation. Then again, Obi's relationship with Clara who is a nurse and an *osu*, a descendent of slaves, in the Igbo community and as per the tradition, should live separately from the free-born.

With the interference of the foreign men in his country initiated a loss of innate values of his people such as societal harmony, giving the society a great expectations and respect for achievers, that caused the lack of self-analysis and the values in the society of Nigeria. The hero Obi struggles with his culture all over the novel and it ends in the internal conflict or for many of the people.

The racial patterns of the public play the key role in identity establishment. The pre-colonial people of Igbo in Nigeria got interrupted by the colonial power during the 1960s. Conversely, the new faith like Christianity amongst them gave a way for a radical change in their social patterns. The individuality of the Igbo clan is no longer as the identity with the titles or eminent warriors as in the first novel. The main character Obi Okonkwo of the novel faces a world that is not as same as his grandfather. The people of Igbo who were under imposing rule for quite a period and espoused the modes of culture. Thus, the Igbo society was formed by the diverse values.

The colonial education and its influence on Obi is one of the liable factors to nurture his dreams and the morals of Nigerian Igbo distinctiveness. He understands the identity of the people is deliberated by the family, that is known to be the significant body amongst Igbo people and the home of the individual is unavoidably subsidiary to it. The isolation of Obi Okonkwo is the consequence of his uncertain nature, and to an extent, his detrimental position. He neither fits into the Umuofian Igbo customs, principles and the culture nor to the foreign culture.

The Igbo social identity in this novel mirrors the dual disputes as they have faith in the old-fashioned way in following the rules of the community and endorsing the societal codes in a contemporary approach to defend the ethnicity. It was referred by Achebe in the novel as

"Those Umuofians (that is the name they call themselves) who leave their home town to find work in towns all over Nigeria regard themselves as sojourners.They return to Umuofia every two years or so to spend their leave. When they have saved up enough money they ask their relations at home to find them a wife, or they build a 'zinc' house on their family land..... No matter where they are in Nigeria, they start a local branch of the Umuofia Progressive Union" [2].

Obi's association with his native people and his father's religion, Christianity cultivate issues of his individuality in Igbo. The modernism slanted the reliability of the people of Igbo that is 'no longer at ease' and Obi, is in the middle of the social agitation and the struggles. It signifies the social identity of the people in his country. Regardless of his status, he wanted to be well-known as a member of clan of Igbo and Umuofian citizen.

His masculinity is interrelated with Ogbuefi Okonkwo, his grandfather who placed his eminence on his private accomplishments as a wrestler and Obi by adjusting the western education. He had no intention of accepting the western philosophy and also the conservatory way of thinking by his people without revolting against the rotten beliefs and customs. He does not approve the European colonization of his home land, and he realises that his culture was declining due to the linguistic and social assimilation of Africa.

IV. THE CATASTROPHIC IDOL, EZEULU OF ARROW OF GOD

Ezeulu, the lead character of Arrow of God deals with agony and misery to alienation. Due to his bigamous household, he is estranged from his clan and is not respected as a leader. His generosity and open-mindedness in promoting his acquaintance with Captain Winterbottom further worsens the situation. This ends in resentment among his friends and kinsmen because of his trustworthiness and thus he is alienated from his own clan. There is also a tension that starts with him defending his God.

To bring this to mind, Achebe has fabricated a multifaceted yet integrated vivid treatment exhibiting a mixture of events that leads to disastrous consequences at the communal levels consequently leading to unforeseen fall of Ezeulu. He is harked back saying he is an 'arrow in the hands of his god.' Nonetheless, the protagonist proves to be a gratified, stubborn man bent on revenge against his own native people. His payback is ordained to assault the very roots of his own clan and people, while others have engrossed in exploring the decisions, actions, and impulses of the protagonist, Ezeulu and their suggestions for the existence of the ethnical ways of Umuaro.

"A story of frustration and of the suicidal defiance which is an individual way of escape from that frustration" and also a story of resilience" [3]

In Arrow of God, Ezeulu is the character whose decisions influence the action in its main outlines..... It is in these decisions that the unknown mainly functions; and the key to its functioning lies in what that character wants to be of which he is unconscious..... His dreams and fantasies, his slips of the tongue can all give us access to his unconscious, which is simply another name for symbolic knowledge insofar as it is an unknown knowledge", a knowledge which the subject does not know he knows" [4]

The main stream of issues and struggle in Arrow of God are amid Ezeulu and Ogbuefi Nwaka, surrogate of Ezidemili, among Ezeulu and the colonial groups, and between Ezeulu or Ulu, which converts to a fight between Ulu's traditional cult and the Christian churches, modernism. Various other patterns that have minimal scope than the above nevertheless interconnect and support to justify the writing. The highest profile among the Ezeulu and Umuaro gives the idea that struggles are changing in unpredicted ways. In Nwaka's criticism early on, he seems to be provoking Ulu on behalf of Umuaro to a contest. But then, the novel features a spiritual moment and Ezeulu is certain that he had caught the deity speaking to set forth the disputes clearly.

"I say who told you that this was your own fight which you could arrange to suit you? You want to save your friends who brought you palm wine he-he-he-he-he!... laughed the deity the way spirits do – a dry, skeletal laugh. „Beware you do not come between me and my victim or you may receive blows not meant for you!.. Do you not know what happens when two elephants fight? ...Go home and sleep and leave me to settle my quarrel with Idemili, who wants to destroy me so that his python may come to power..... Now you tell me how it concerns you. I say go home and sleep. As for me and Idemili we shall fight to the finish; and whoever throws the other down will strip him of his anklet" [5]

Achebe has described the impact of Christian missionaries and political change in Igbo community. He has used a unique technique to portray this, where first he talks about the Igbo clan and the talks about the communal changes due to the intervention of new religion, Christianity.

"Another traditional text that influenced Achebe is Joyce Cary's *Mister Johnson*. This novel, also set in Nigeria, struck Achebe as "a most superficial picture of-not only of the country-but even of the Nigerian characters, and so I thought if this was famous, then perhaps someone ought to try and look at this from the inside" [6]

Thus, in this story, Ezeulu is tested by fate and irony now and then, but there are no qualms that the storyline is profoundly compassionate towards him. Correspondingly, the effect of Obika's demise on Umuaro does echo back to certain extent on the storyteller. But the "literal unconscious", seemingly entitles a new track for Umuaro, and fairly unconnected to what had been until then.

V. CONCLUSION

After the text edit has been completed, the paper is ready for the template. Duplicate the template file by using the Save As command, and use the naming convention prescribed by your conference for the name of your paper. In this newly created file, highlight all of the contents and import your prepared text file. You are now ready to style your paper; use the scroll down window on the left of the MS Word Formatting toolbar.

REFERENCES

- [1] Coupland, Nikolas and Adam Jaworski. *Sociolinguistics: A Reader and Coursebook*. New York:
- [2] Achebe, Chinua. *No longer at Ease*. Modern Classics. Penguin Books.1960.
- [3] Mahood, M.M. „Idols of the Den“. *Critical Perspectives on Chinua Achebe*. Ed. C.L. Innes and Bernth Lindfors. London: Heinemann, 1979. 180-206
- [4] Evans, Dylan. *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*. New York: Routledge, 1996.
- [5] Achebe, Chinua. *Arrow of God*. Penguin Books.1964.
- [6] Pieterse, Cosmo and Duerden, Dennis, eds. *African Writers Talking: A Collection of Radio Interviews*. London: Heinemann, 1972.

IJRTI