

The theme of tradition in arrow of god

[Religion](#), [God](#)



Traditions dictate the lives of the people of Umuaro. Seasons are punctuated by rituals, and festivals are managed by the priests of the various deities associated with each village. The overall deity, Ulu, provides the important purification rites as well as feast associated with the rhythms of agriculture. In Arrow of God we see that these traditions are undermined by the coming of Christianity, the power of the British colonial office, and, most importantly, by Ezeulu's inflexibility and insistence on adhering to tradition. Ezeulu insists on waiting a full month to eat each sacred yam, even though that means he can't call the Feast of the New Yam for another three months. Meanwhile, the people's crops are rotting in the field and people are starving to death. The elders of Umuaro offer to take the punishment on themselves, but Ezeulu refuses. While Ezeulu is stubbornly following tradition – and punishing his people – the people of Umuaro slowly begin to starve because they are unable to harvest the crops. Aspects of Ibo Culture in Arrow of God Arrow of God offers a complex exploration of the dynamics of the socio-cultural values of the Ibo people of Nigeria, the most populous country in Africa. Virtually all aspects of people's culture are portrayed with remarkable efficiency. For the purpose of this study, twelve aspects of Ibo culture addressed in the novel are examined while others are mentioned. These are associated with time, family structure, greetings, virginity (chastity), marriage, religion, hospitality, occupation, food, festivals, name, communications, etc.

Folklore is common to all people. It is a body of expressive culture within a particular population comprising the tradition of that culture, subculture, or group. Abrams defines it as “ the collective names applied to verbal materials and social rituals that have been handed down solely, or at least

primarily, by word of mouth and by example, rather than in written form". It includes, among other things, folktales, riddles, proverbs, myths, songs, legends and superstitions. Folklore developed in pre-literate societies and still flourishes in communities where the oral culture still dominates.

Time: The notion of time is not foreign to African experience. Time markers are the sun and the moon, for days and months respectively. Twelve moons make a year and four market days make week. Cock-crow (p. 18) signals the beginning of day and nightfall comes by " sunset" (p. 16) and birds help in determining time. Achebe succeeds in underscoring the fact that Africans had their means of tracking time before the invention of clocks and the contact with the Europeans.

Family Structure: The family structure in traditional Africa is polygamous. Ezeulu has two living wives, the third having died. The family live together in a compound where each woman has her own hut. The older male children get their own huts/obi built when they are ripe for marriage. There is a division of labor in the family set-up determined by gender differences. Women cook and fetch water. Men work on the farms and build huts. Wives take turn to cook for the husbands (p. 13) as the husbands share their wives' beds in turns. The first son moves into the father's obi when the latter dies. The father maintains a firm grip on the household and enforces discipline by preventing and settling disputes. Jealousy between wives is a possibility, not a rule.

Greetings: In Ibo culture, greetings take place by invoking the name of the greeted. Ezeulu's sons, Nwafo and Edogo, salute him by saying " Ezeulu!"

Greeting a group of people is done by calling the group name: “ Umuaro kwenu...”, the response to which is “ Hem!”(pp. 15, 16 etc.). Men shake hands and refusing to take an extended hand is a face threatening act, a sign of hostility, like the refusal of Akukalia to shake the hand of Ebo (p. 22).

Virginity: Virginity, the distinctive mark of chastity, is treasured among ladies and a newly-wedded wife that is not “ found at home”(p. 118) is an eternal disgrace to herself and family. Akuata’s mother is apprehensive about her and she is nervous about the distant possibility of her not being found at home by her husband, Obika. No woman would want the message that the husband of Ogbanje Omenyi sent to his mother- in-law; a request “ for a matchet to cut the bush on either side of the highway which she carried between her thighs” (p. 123), a rebuke occasioned by his disappointment in finding his new wife already deflowered.

Marriage: Marriage is a sacred institution in. It is for this reason that divorce is a kind of taboo, and if there is one, all efforts are made to re-unite the couple. Marriage has special rites and rituals that accompany it so that the wife’s new life is secured and insured. A new bride is accompanied by family and friends to her husband’s house with a lot of gifts, mostly cooking utensils, cloths and food items (pp. 118-120). It is not a trivial matter left in the hands of the couple alone

Religion: There is the concept of god Communal life revolves around religious rituals and sacrifices. The Union of Umuaro is made possible by the power of Ulu, to whom his Chief Priest, Ezeulu, offers prayers: “ ...let our wives bear male children...” (p. 6). Priests enjoy social respect as the

custodians of the tradition. There is chi, one's personal god, that an individual must not challenge, as the silly little bird, nza did. Animals are dedicated to gods, and here the sacred python belonging to Idemili is a religious symbol that no one should kill. There is also ikenga, the strength of one's right arm, representing an individual's ancestors, given daily sacrifice (p. 37). As ikenga is only broken when one is dead, destroying a person's ikenga is like committing murder. The inaction of breaking of a living man's ikenga leads to the death of Akukalia and the resultant war between Umuaro and Okperi.

Hospitality: The Ibo people are hospitable to their guests. Basic items of entertaining visitors are pieces of kolanut (p. 20), white clay and palm wine. Kolanut is eaten while white clay is used to draw lines of personal emblem (p. 206). There are variations in lines drawn with white chalk. Onwuzoligbo as a guest draw three vertical lines below which lies a horizontal line (p. 62); Akuebue's lines are just four upright lines (p. 95) as a guest of Ezeulu while Ezeulu's emblem is five lines, three upright lines and a horizontal line at the base (p. 111). Despite the hostility between Umuachala (Ezeulu's village) and Umunneora (the village of Ezeulu's main adversary, Nwaka) John Nwodika of Umunneora and his wife receive Ezeulu well at Okperi. A guest also paints his big toe with the chalk. A guest brings along his horn (for drinking palm wine) as well as his multi-purpose goatskin bag.

Occupation: The main occupations of Africans or Ibo are farming, carving, palm-tree tapping and trading at the market. Carpentry is a new profession

that has come with colonial administration and Moses Nwachukwu, “ the first and foremost convert in Umuaro”(p. 47)has the privilege of being one.

Another occupation is traditional medical practice, done through the knowledge and use of herbs, roots and sacrificial animals.

Food: The main food of the people is fofoo, which is often taken with bitter - leaf soup. Other aspects of local cuisine include yam pottage, meat or “ boiled legs of goat”, pounded cassava, roasted yam and cocoyam, taken with palm oil (pp. 9; 13; 116-117; 159). These can be contra-distinguished from the colonial food: “ fresh fruit, salad made from pawpaw, banana and oranges”(p. 108).

Festival: Religion, rituals and festivals play complementary roles in most parts of the world. The major festivals in Arrow of God are Pumpkin Leaves Feast and New Yam Festival. Both of these festivals of the Ibo are given elaborate details. Apart from these major two, most of the six villages that make up Umuaro have their local festivals. As Achebe puts it, “ Umuagu celebrated their Mgba Agbogho or the Wrestling of the Maidens; Umunneora observed their annual feast in honour of Idemili; Owner of the python”. While the six villages celebrated Oso Nwanadi to placate resentful spirits of the fallen war heroes, Umuachala celebrated its own minor Akwu Nro, “ a memorial offering by widows to the departed husbands” (p. 194).

Name: Naming is highly significant in Africa. Achebe makes use of the names and in driving home his themes. Devourer like Leopard is Obika’s age-group, Otakagu, the younger age-group being referred to as Omumawa (p. 77).

Captain Winterbottom is code-named Destroyer of Guns and the day of Dr.

Savage's surgical operations is the Day of Cutting Open of the Bowels. A versed native doctor or dibia is known as The Bow that shoots at the Sky (p. 157). Achebe also diminishes foreign names: rather than call John his name, he is always referred to as Nwodika's son, his first name reduced to a sort of anathema (pp165; 167). That Achebe does this on purpose is evidenced by his own rejection of his christened name Albert, which he dropped as a University undergraduate (Achebe, 1988: 33).

Communications: Communal messages are passed across by beating ogene (as Ezeulu does to announce the new moon, for instance (p. 2)). There are announcers who assist the community in sending such signals to all and sundry while beating the drum (p. 65). In summoning the elders for a meeting (p. 141) or during festivals where there are audience, ikolo is beaten as a form of traditional ritual as well as paying tributes to dignitaries (pp. 70-71). Ogene is also beaten from Ulu's shrine during major festivals.

Other aspects of cultural practices that find expression in Achebe's Arrow of God are communalism, village administration and decision-making process, (carrying a Goatskin bag along everywhere one goes: "wisdom is like a goatskin bag; everyman carries his own" (p. 16); the host breaks kolanut for the guest, etc) friendship (between Ezeulu and Akuehue; Obika and Ofoedu), medical practices, death and rites of passage, as well as apotheosis. All these make Arrow of God.

THE POSTCOLONIAL REALITIES OF THE AFRICAN CONTINENT WITH CLOSE REFERENCE TO THE FLOODS BY JOHN RUGANDA.

In *The Floods* John Ruganda talks of the political events during Amin's rule, in *The Floods* characterization themes and plot are all inspired by events in Amin's Uganda. The play revolves around two characters namely Bwogo, a prominent member of an imaginary dictatorial elite, and Nankya, who is an intellectual. The State Research Bureau that Bwogo heads is in fact a government terror outfit whose sole purpose is to eliminate enemies of the state. *The Floods* is structured into three waves with each one symbolizing the escalation of conflict and confrontation between the two. For instance, at the beginning a headman is trying to mobilize citizens to vacate an island in order to avoid "floods."

The government has announced over the radio that people should evacuate from the island because there are looming floods. However Kyeyune refuses to heed the call because he senses a trap. It is clear that the islanders are being cheated into being saved but are not aware that they are getting into a trap, they are later drowned in the lake by the SRB boys who instead of saving them kills them by shooting them. Bwogo has the intention of killing Nankya and her mother despite the fact that he had an intimate relationship with Nankya.

BWOGO: The cat and rat game we are indulging in. Let's cut it out. It's becoming dangerous.

NANKYA: You started it. We are not half-through yet. Let's drive it to very end, however bitter, you said.

BWOGO: (accusing voice but delicately) Did I now?

NANKYA: (aggressive) didn't you?

BWOGO: (half apologetic) In the heat of the moment, maybe. Effective prodding and needling did it. You made your point.

NANKYA: So did you. Loud and clear. Wasting no punches. Hitting where it hurts most. (The Floods 35)

The extract here shows the romantic relationship between Nankya and Bwogo. Their relationship is symbolic and it shows how the citizens of the African nations suffer in the hands of the government, it symbolizes the kind of relationship that the citizens have with the governments. Nankya is characterized as weak and resilient even if she is abused by Bwogo.

Although Bwogo accuses her of “ sleeping” (The Floods 84-85) her way to academic Prominence, she also reminds him of the ruthlessness of the killer squad (SRB) which he heads. The killer squad is exposed Kyeyune when he recounts how he discovered a human finger while eating fish. The incident when Kyeyune witnesses the massacre of the islanders in the rescue boat which reminds him of an incident when he fished out a dead body of a brigadier with three nails in his skull and genitals in his mouth. This is similar to what the African leader and dictators did to the innocent citizens that they lead. In The Floods, it was mostly the women and children who were the main victims.

In most African nations, poverty is the order of the day; the citizens linger in abject poverty while the so called leaders are filthy rich at the expenses of the legitimate citizens of the country. In the floods, John Ruganda depicts this

very clearly. Bwogo lives in lavish lifestyle and is very rich while most of the hardworking citizens are poor while they also deserve to be rich and wealthy as the other members of the elite politicians, the politicians who are not even well educated are rewarded handsomely while the intellectuals are left to suffer and are even denied what belongs to them.

Corruption and nepotism is another depiction of the African countries that Ruganda has used in his play *The Floods*, Boss is very corrupt, his position allows him to employ his relatives. In as much as Bwogo wasn't a good student, he still manages to secure employment as the chairman of the building board and the head of the state research bureau. He even gets promotions, his father a man without integrity and who loved money is a master in the village and this is because of the strong connections and the people he knew. Nankya even says that had they died in the boat with her mother then the people would be charged with treason but again presidential pardon would be granted if they agreed to appear on television and confess their crimes. Court cases are not also judged justly and they are merely dismissed because the bodies weren't found. Ruganda manages to expose the African leaders by exposing how they kill people they perceive as threat and for the fun of it, Kyeyune found a dead body with three nails on the head and his genitals on the mouth. This shows that the victim was tortured first before he was killed anyone who is seen as a threat to the ruling government is killed as soon as possible. The government decides to kill people with the intention to kill Nankya, the place is said to be flooded with blood and this shows just how much killing has taken place.

The African governments are known to instill fear to its citizen and this is evident when the fisherman finds a dead body in the lake. This instills fear and anxiety in him and the people in general. He again discovers human finger while eating fish, he freezes with fear, he even witnesses the islanders being executed and thus he is in a lot of fear. Bwogo is also fearful and at one moment he sees floods of people coming to revenge against him. In the play, the female character Nankya is instrumental in luring Bwogo to the house on the island, which eventually makes it easy for the coup plotters to catch him. Nankya is not as naïve as Bwogo had imagined her to be. She is not a mere sexual object and hapless intellectual. Rather she turns out to be self-consciously perceptive about her own feminine powers and uses them to the fullest. As the play ends, Nankya is the centre of anticipated change. Through Nankya in *The Floods* is packaged into both an oppression and liberation symbol for the African nation. Masculinity is regarded as representative of authority while femininity is looked down upon. While men are proud to regard women as emblem of nationhood, in practice women are often marginalized.