

THINGS THAT WOULD NOT FALL APART: APPRAISING IGBO TRADITION IN ACHEBE'S CULTURE - SPECIFIC NARRATIVES

UWAKWE, Uchenna David
Directorate of General Studies
Federal University of Technology
Owerri – Nigeria.
davdumga69@yahoo.com

Abstract

With the translation of Chinua Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart* into several languages, scholars have been more preoccupied with investigating how the colonial intrusions affected those cultures. The general assumption is that the customs of the Igbo people have all fallen apart, and perhaps beyond repair. However there are reasons to begin to re-appraise these standpoints. In *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*, the reader perceives how Achebe explores the celebration or performance of certain aspects of the Igbo culture. In the first novel, *Things Fall Apart*, before the incident considered to be the falling apart interface, the socio-political and religious lives of the people which are part of the human intercourse are highlighted. But much more, they are explored in further thematic intensity in *Arrow of God*. This is considered to be Achebe's objective which is significant in pointing to those Igbo cultural practices which might have been caught in what the author sees as the 'crossroads', yet they are less prone to crumble. It is pertinent to interrogate these elements of culture so as to also provide a yardstick for measuring what may be considered as the patterns of Igbo life which Achebe celebrated.

Keywords: Things fall apart, Arrow of God, Igbo cosmology, Culture

Introduction

As much as Chinua Achebe's novels encapsulate the African experience in the postcolonial world order, species of the Igbo culture-scape are prominent. Nonetheless, the conjecture that Achebe was inclined to portraying the deprecation of prominent aspects of the Igbo culture has often been made to absolve the natives, his compatriots, of the charges on why it is mostly said that things fell apart. In the Golden Jubilee commemoration critique of *Things Fall Apart*, Nwachukwu-Agbada's title, 'Nothing Fell Apart', elicits the shades of ironies with which Achebe inaugurates as the 'crossroads' of civilization. Indeed, it is his portrayal of the cultural crises at the dawn of the European colonizing enterprise around the Igbo world of Africa. But most profoundly, to suggest that nothing fell apart in *Things Fall Apart* (TFA) gives warrant to identifying each of the representations of culture, and drawing convincing logic from Achebe's culture-specific narratives.

Hudson derives a definition by Goodenough (1957: 71) which substantiates the import of culture from perspectives that are anthropological and moralist. It states that, "a society's culture consists of whatever it is one has to know or believe in order to operate in a manner acceptable to

its members". The discourse on culture cannot be divorced from the people whose values are in focus, indeed the personages whose actions or inactions elicit how tangible culture may become. In considering the tie between people and their culture, Cuddon observes, "how people become part of a culture, and the relationship between culture and power, including the reasons why some forms of culture are valued over others, are considered important issues for investigation" (2013: 179-180). It suggests that certain cultural values may be identified and separated with respect to their persisting relevance or redundancy in the society where they are upheld. It is pertinent therefore to appraise the key aspects of the Igbo social system, as highlighted in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (TFA) and *Arrow of God* (AOG). The objective is to ascertain how significantly they have persisted in contemporary Igbo socio-cultural structure.

However, it may also be argued that if the things believed to have fallen apart did not exactly happen, it is then reasonable to pinpoint the exact things that fell apart, and most pertinently, the things that would refuse to fall apart. A superficial view of Nwachukwu-Agbada's thrust in 'Nothing Fell Apart' would indeed yield a complex that rather challenges what has been commonly upheld as the Achebe's intention. It summarily represents a more realistic outlook – the fact that situating the tangibility of those decimated cultural values has been somewhat elusive among the readers of the novel. More importantly, in elucidating multifaceted ironic planes of perception, Nwachukwu-Agbada suggests that much more than a surface evaluation of the appurtenances of culture would be required in appreciating Achebe's grand design in his first novel *Things Fall Apart*.

It is for this reason, perhaps, that Achebe had been constrained to implant in *Arrow of God* a deliberate overflow of those cultural values in *Things Fall Apart* which ought not be included in the said 'falling apart'. While there are key indicators that the *Things Fall Apart* (1958) setting pre-dated that of *Arrow of God* (1964), certain details in the latter novel implicate a more compact density of the Igbo culture. Whether Achebe deliberately extended such prominent subjects from the first novel to the latter may not exactly matter as much as the recognition that the issues have generated, and would continue to generate, conflicts in the postcolonial Igbo world. It is logical to suppose that the key elements of the Igbo culture which also come in focus in *Arrow of God* were meant to explore these significant elements of culture in further details.

There are two instances of such conflicts related with the same character-names, Akueke and Egonwanne. It is also easy to perceive how the ancestry of these characters and the roles that they are assigned give the justification for the two novels. The Akuekes feature in the presentation of the Igbo marriage custom. In *Things Fall Apart*, Akueke is Obierika's daughter whose traditional marriage rites portray the processes and facts of Igbo marriage (TFA, 55-58). The character Akueke in *Arrow of God* is Ezeulu's daughter whose husband used to beat up until her brother did something bizarre. They went to the husband's house beat him up and carried him on their head to Ezeulu's home. Yet, the matter was resolved and Achebe presents a paradoxical Igbo philosophy that pertains to marriage and the resolution of attendant conflicts. In seeking to find peace between Akueke and her husband, Ezeulu's in-laws say: "We have not come with wisdom but with foolishness because a man does not go to his in-law with wisdom"(12). Achebe relates Ezeulu's response, "he employed all his skill in speaking to pacify his in-laws. They went home happier than they came" (13).

In both novels, the name Egonwanne features in the contexts where the people were meant to engage other villages in wars. Much earlier in *Things Fall Apart* the reader is led into the most critical conflict, that “there were indeed occasions when the Oracle had forbidden Umuofia to wage a war. If the clan had disobeyed the Oracle they would surely have been beaten, because their dreaded *agadi-nwanyi* would never fight what the Ibo call *a fight of blame*” (*TFA*, 10). It was this matter of the *fight of blame* that led to Okonkwo’s suicide – and by extension why things were said to have fallen apart. Okonkwo who regarded Egonwanne as a coward who moved their warriors to impotence says: “If they had ignored his womanish wisdom five years ago, we would not have come to this... Tomorrow he will tell them that our fathers never fought a “war of blame” (*TFA*, 160). But, in *Arrow of God*, the character Egonwanne takes another role. At the moment of deciding whether they would go to war or not, he remains silent. It is for this reason that Ezeulu enthuses that, “Ogbuefi Egonwanne as one of the three oldest men in Umuaro should have reminded us that our fathers did not fight a war of blame” (*AOG*, 18).

The war is considered in this essay as a matter of immense postcolonial weight for two reasons. The first is that in *Things Fall Apart*, it was the cowardly response of the people to the call to war against the white man which suggested that things had fallen apart. After Okonkwo beheaded the white man’s messenger, his people abandoned him because he “knew that Umuofia would not go to war” (*TFA*, 163), the matter of the war implicated the Igbo communality, leadership and followership, and prominently too, the religious implications of engaging in wars. But much more, the second of these reasons is that Achebe appeared to have foreshadowed the events of the Nigeria-Biafra war in which Britain and the allied West stood vehemently to annihilate the visions which led to the declaration of the sovereignty of Biafra by Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu (Selected Speeches, 193-194). These were principles which streamed from the Igbo tradition – the respect for humanity.

In affirming that change is imperative in life, Achebe’s portrayal of Okonkwo’s seeming stiff-necked rigidity in the face of the evolving social dynamism which the Umuofia society of his post-exile implicated, more than his temper or pride, becomes the most equivocal tragic flaw. In several instances in *Things Fall Apart*, the characters relate how certain statutory observances in Umuofia had been mitigated for very obvious reasons. Regarding the breaking of the Week of Peace, Ogbuefi Ezeudu recounts how the punishment for this offence had changed. He says:

My father told me that he had been told that in the past a man who broke the peace was dragged on the ground through the village until he died. But after a while this custom was stopped because it spoils the peace it was meant to preserve (*TFA*, 25).

While it is logical to conclude that the Igbo culture which Achebe highlights also made sufficient provision for change when it became imperative, none of such instances of a communal call for change amounts to a desecration of values. Another evidence of this change in customs which implicates the dynamism in society and particularly the pursuit of humanism is found in *Arrow of God*:

Nnanyelugo reminded them that even in the matter of taking titles there had been a change. Long, long ago there had been a fifth title in Umuaro – the title of the king. But the conditions for its attainment had been so severe that no man had

ever taken it., one of the conditions being that the man aspiring to be king must first pay the debts of every man and every woman in Umuaro. (AOG, 209)

Nonetheless, the Igbo society portrayed in *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* also re-presents how the conflicts among the tripartite complexes of the political, economic and religious values become so intertwining that each relates to the other in some kind of cause and effect interaction that is nearly cyclic. Perhaps, it is in another bid to establish the immensity of this complex that Achebe's *Arrow of God* moulds the protagonist, Ezeulu, whose name and title are formed in compounding 'Eze' (king) and *Ulu* (the deity whose priest he is). While the name captures the intricate link between the political and the religious offices, the commitment to the obligations of the dual responsibilities of this office impinge, no doubt, on the success of the economic.

Political Culture

The portrayal of the acephalous Umuofia socio-political system has also given credence to the several affirmations on the matter of decentralized power hold, a phenomenon that substantiates *Igbo-enwe-eze* (the myth that the Igbo don't have kings). In this setting, it is common to recognize groups which functioned as organs of governance with measures of relevance in the administration of law and order within the setting. To belong to the exalted rank of governance, maturity (in terms of the wisdom and experience that age affords) was a virtue. Additionally, individual accomplishments were recognized in relation to family as well as communal responsibilities. There were also remote structures for the observation of checks and balances.

The socio-political organization gave warrant to the preservation of the sovereignty, integrity and harmony within the community. As it is with Okonkwo, the levels of achievement as individual within the family unit had extended to impact on the community, and certified the status which the society accorded him. He was also recognized and prominent in the class of title holders and the cult of *egwugwu* jurists. The composition of the nine villages among the membership of *egwugwu* demonstrates the orderliness within the clan. And even among them, the leadership of the cult is not contested. This is seen in the trace to the origin of the Umuofia clan,

Each of the nine *egwugwu* represented a village of the clan. The leader was called evil forest. Smoke poured out of his head. The nine villages of Umuofia had grown out of the nine sons of the first father of the clan. Evil forest represented the village of Umueru, or the children of Eru, who was the eldest of the nine sons (TFA, 71).

At the same time, evil forest was also meant to be a mouthpiece. One of the episodes of their consultations is captured thus:

The nine *egwugwu* then went away to consult together in their house. They were silent for a long time. Then the metal gong gong sounded and the flute was blown. The *egwugwu* had emerged once again from their underground home. They saluted one another and then reappeared on the *ilo* (TFA, 74).

Not only was the judicial system transparent, the ritual of the *egwugwu* cult members remarkably expressed the impartial stance of the earth goddess, *ani*. Their often retirement to 'their underground home', and the almost incredible emergence from tiny antholes is nothing

else but an invocation of the supernatural. However, with Okonkwo's membership of the *egwugwu*, Achebe's narrative bears the evidence that the protagonist had translated from the youthful wrestler into the super-human caucus whose judicial functions were performed in their masked, yet elevated identities as ancestral spirits in the land. It says, "Okonkwo's wives and perhaps other women as well might have noticed that the second *egwugwu* had the springy walk of Okonkwo. And they might have noticed that Okonkwo was not among the titled men and elders who sat behind the row of *egwugwu*" (*TFA*, 72).

Therefore, the ranking as well as the socio-political class is seen to comprise the *egwugwu*, the titled men and the elders, in that order. Each member of these groups is expected to have matured in appreciating how the negation of the natural laws of the land results in consequences that are often most tragic. In spite of the fact that there were no records of the constitutional provisions of the Umuofia land, reason and antecedent courses of events provided for order where there were no proclamations from the gods of the land on given matters. An instance which affirms the seemingly parliamentary role of elders and *ndichie* (title holders) in governance comes thus:

The elders, or *ndichie*, met to hear Okonkwo's mission. At the end they decided, as everybody knew they would, that the girl should go to Ogbuefi Udo to replace his murdered wife. As for the boy, he belonged to the clan as a whole, and there was no hurry to decide his fate (*TFA*, 10-11).

The members of the Umuofia society are conversant with the requirements of humanism and social justice. As such, the fact that there was the kind of decentralized authority in which the executive arm of government was redundant was so because there was little need for law enforcement where the people yielded to the requirements of the customary laws. Indeed, law enforcement became another requirement of their communality. It was the kind of communality that pursued fairness and sought equilibrium between a persisting class consciousness and the need for social justice. As it is revealed in the myth of the origin of the Umuaro setting in *Arrow of God*, "They said that when the six villages first came together they offered the priesthood of Ulu to the weakest among them to ensure that none of the alliance became too powerful" (*AOG*, 15).

In the Umuofia, *Things Fall Apart* setting for instance, to mature into becoming a title holder meant assuming several roles and responsibilities in governance as well as maintaining a near perfect moral status. The worth of title-taking in Umuofia is compared with other lands: "...our clan holds the ozo title in high esteem, ... In Abame and Aninta, the title is worth less than two cowries. Every man wears the thread of title on his ankle, and does not lose it even if he steals" (*TFA*, 55). The harmony which the larger society of Umuofia was seen to enjoy was a consequence of the attention paid to enforcing moral standards within the family units. Therefore, the recognition of Okonkwo's achievements as one who also has three wives and children under his firm control not only implicates his leadership abilities but is supported by the fact that his family adds up a reasonable number to the population of the clan. Nwakibie's accomplishments relates another instance in which an individual's success brings about the measure of recognition that becomes somewhat political.

In the same vein, Nwakibie's success is measured thus: "There was a wealthy man in Okonkwo's village who had three huge barns, nine wives and thirty children. His name was

Nwakibie and he had taken the highest but one title which a man could take in the clan” (TFA, 15). In further portraying the order in Nwakibie’s family, Achebe narrative says:

Anasi was the first wife and others could not drink before her, and so they stood waiting. Anasi was a middle-aged woman, tall and strongly built. There was authority in her bearing and she looked every inch the ruler of the womenfolk in a large and prosperous family. She wore the anklet of her husband’s titles, which the first wife alone could wear... She then went down on one knee, drank a little and handed back the horn... The other wives drank in the same way, in their proper order, and went away (TFA, 16).

The social structure was a natural construct which provided for the celebration of events, and persons or groups who could neither refuse nor hesitate to conform to the known order within the society. Therefore, the consciousness of the abiding order within the community at any point in time was measured by its agreement with acceptable moral standards. Therefore, while the perception of the right or wrong conduct varied in terms of time and context, each also gave force to the stability of the economy within the community as well as prosperity of individual members of the society.

Economic Culture

In spite of the intricate probability of detaching the elements of the Igbo economic culture from the religious, there are reasons to believe that the reactions of the Umuofia people to the violation of their spiritual patrimony indicted the consciousness of the economic implication of each of their actions and responses. Much more that the act of trampling on the right of the woman (Ekwefi, Okonkwo’s second wife), Okonkwo’s violation of the week of peace was to precipitate a communal calamity. This is glaring from Ezeani’s response to Okonkwo:

You know as well as I do that our forefathers ordained that before we plant any crops in the earth we should observe a week in which a man does not say a harsh word to his neighbour. We live in peace with our fellows to honour our great goddess of the earth without whose blessing our crops will not grow. You have committed a great evil (TFA, 24).

Within the same scene, there is an affirmation that Okonkwo’s abomination was not a charge against spousal assault – for there is at least one instance in which an altercation may permit or justify wife-beating. But, in the matter of the week of peace, even the demand for justice becomes an abomination. One of the instances given is put thus “Your wife was at fault, but even if you came into your *Obi* and found her lover on top of her, you would still have committed a great evil to beat her. The earth goddess whom you have insulted may refuse to give us her increase and we shall all perish” (TFA, 24). Therefore, the emphasis on life and existence is predicated on the wellbeing of the people who potentially have economic value. In this consciousness, Nwakibie’s success is measured thus: “There was a wealthy man in Okonkwo’s village who had three huge barns, nine wives and thirty children. His name was Nwakibie and he had taken the highest but one title which a man could take in the clan” (TFA, 15).

his daughter’s marriage, Nwakibie’s prayer recollects the process of life that also implicates the economy: “We shall live. We pray for life, children, and good harvest and happiness.... (15). With the encounter between Okonkwo and Nwakibie, Achebe discloses other

imperatives of economic development as well as accompanying disaster. Okonkwo had looked back at a certain year in which he lost all his yams to a disastrous season. The picture painted of the weather is that, “The blazing sun returned, more fierce than it had ever been known, and scorched all the green that had appeared with the rains. The earth burned like hot coals and roasted all the yams that had been sown” (18). It was in the same year that Okonkwo had borrowed eight hundred seed yams from Nwakibie. The traditional economic strategy, share-cropping was the only alternative left to Okonkwo who was determined to make success out of a poor economic family background.

Given that Agriculture represents a very prominent aspect of the Igbo economic culture, Achebe gives substantial patronage to how Okonkwo and Nwakibie, two of Umuofia’s prominent and wealthy characters engaged in farming. Not only was Nwakibie respected, there was order in his large. He was the one Okonkwo met to borrow yam seedlings. In teaching Nwoye and Ikemefuna the art of farming, Okonkwo demonstrated how to prepare seed yams because yam which was adjudged ‘the king of crops’ demanded more attention and skills to tend. He desired that his children would become great and respected members of the Umuofia society through their success in farming. The New Yam festival was passionately celebrated because “it began a season of plenty – the new year” (*TFA*, 29).

There were several set backs associated with scarce economic resources. One of the reasons why the items listed for performing the marriage rites is made a little expensive is to ensure that there is economic stability within the new family that is to be inaugurated. Okonkwo was unable to marry Ekwefi initially because he could not afford the requirements for their marriage rites. But, as his economic status became enhanced and his fame grew with his wrestling exploits, Ekwefi then saw the need to abandon her first husband to marry him. Apart from his fame as the champion wrestler, other evidences of Okonkwo’s success captured here implicate economic considerations,

He was a wealthy farmer and had two barns full of yams and had just married his third wife. To crown it all he had taken two titles and had shown incredible prowess in two inter-tribal wars. And so although Okonkwo was still young, he was already one of the greatest men of his time. Age was respected but achievement was revered (*TFA*, 7).

Okonkwo’s abomination relates to an individual or a family disrupting the economic wellbeing of the community because of his crazy ambitions. On the other hand, it is also unacceptable to be bereft of ambition, Such act might even be worse because it leads to Unoka’s own flaw. In most of the scenes where the respect for industry is highlighted, it is often placed in contrast to the manifest expressions of indolence and outcomes that inaugurate shame. Although Unoka had been thrown into the evil (abominable) forest to die of the swelling disease, Achebe made succinct expressions of the shame that resulted from his laziness. He was always in debt and had developed such a despicable tough approach to evading repaying his creditors. It is in the priest’s response to Unoka, who claimed to have done everything to succeed that we learn that even the gods were quite aware of his indolence. The priest says:

You have offended neither the gods nor your fathers. And when a man is at peace with his and his ancestors, his harvest will be good or bad according to the strength of his arm. You, Unoka, are known in all the clan for the waekness of your matchet and your hoe. When your neighbours go out with their axe to cut

down virgin forest, you sow your yams on exhausted farms that take no labour to clear (AOG, 14).

In *Arrow of God*, the same carefree attitude to life is portrayed in the character, Obika whose irresponsibility led to his being whipped by the white man (AOG, 81-82). Obika and his friend Ofoedu had arrived late to the site where Mr Wright was supervising the work on the hew road. Their lateness demonstrates the height of irresponsibility which was also a consequence of their habitual drunkenness. Obika himself affirms: "When I think of it now we were very foolish to have followed such a dangerous man to his own house. Do you remember that he did not drink even one hornful" (80).

Religious Culture

The consciousness of the Igbo religion is one of the key evidences that Achebe had to give a more distinctive attention to culture in *Arrow of God* than he did in his first novel. The belief system of the Umuofia people is noteworthy. Moreso, the protagonist Ezeulu is created by Achebe as the chief priest of the land, Umuaro. In *Things Fall Apart*, when eventually the gods decided that the boy, Ikemefuna was to be taken outside their village and killed, in conformity with their custom, Ogbuefi Ezeudu had related the decision of the gods as though the people had gathered to reach an agreement on the matter. As Ezeudu said to Okonkwo, "Yes, Umuofia has decided to kill him. The oracle of the Hills and Caves has pronounced it" (TFA, 46). It was symbolic that the boy was not to be killed in the land of Umuofia. Elizabeth Isichei observes that,

Ana, the divine Earth, has a key role in Igbo religion, reflecting the values of an agricultural community. Many offences were regarded as abominable, not so much in themselves, but because they offended her. In some expositions of Igbo religion, its core is the polarity between *Chukwu* and *Ana*, between the transcendent and the visible (27)

Achebe's re-presentation of the religious – the influence and presence of the ever watchful earth and its goddess, *ani* (note the dialectal switch between 'Ana' and 'Ani'), is a prominent accomplishment in the two novels. The involvement of the gods in Achebe's works often relates how people are warned or reprimanded for offences that were likely to upset the traditional order in society. Much of the laws were either made by the gods of the land or they came from the people's awareness of the moral dictates which *ani* (the earth goddess) had to certify. It was therefore rare for any member of the Umuofia (Igbo) society to plead ignorant of the laws and lores of the land.

It may be said, that both the falling apart of the communality of Umuofia and the offences committed by both Okonkwo and Enoch were affronts on their religiosity. If Okonkwo had been banished for seven years for committing the *female ochu* – the inadvertent killing of a kinsman, should he still have been breathing bloodshed to the point of beheading the messenger. Even before the colonial/Christian mission, the Igbo culture as well as many other customs in Africa had entrenchments on the regard for life and humanity. Indeed what literally fell apart was the will of certain individual members of the Umuofia community to uphold what was known as their communal will. In *Things Fall Apart*, Obierika says:

But he says that our customs are bad; and our own brothers who have taken up his religion also say that our customs are bad. How do you think we can fight when our own brothers have turned against us? The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers, and our clan can no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart (*TFA*, 141).

A pertinent question to ask is, could the civilization which the West introduced not have enjoyed some compromise with the native customs? And, did the civilization project indeed wipe out the entirety of the religious customs of Africans? It is in interrogating these issues that the cultural values which would not fall apart may be detached especially as they are embraced within Igbo religiosity. These include: moral sanctity, the value for marriage and family, respect for industry, the rejection of inordinate ambition and pride. Each of these values within the Igbo religiosity is constantly recollected and transmitted in the proverbs, folktales, myths and songs.

In the *Arrow of God* instance, the implantaion of truth and morality in the training of children is prominent in the land matter which was to lead to the war. Ezeulu had testified against his Umuaro people in the Okperi land case following what his father had told him. In response to this Nwaka says: “We know that a father does not speak falsely to his son. But we also know that the lore of the land is beyond the knowledge of many fathers” (*AOG*, 16). This observation, fictional though, implicates the need to understand certain anthropological consequences of culture.

Marriage is not only valued among the Igbo people but always celebrated. The people always look forward to the celebration of marriage which is known to be a communal event. In the portrayal of the regard for marriage and its celebration in both *TFA* and *AOG*, Achebe’s choice of the same name, Akueke is symbolic and instructive. The derivation of the name *Aku* (wealth) *eke* (python) is symbolic of the value placed on the morality and sanctity of the bride. Ogbuefi Ezenwa’s speech at the marriage of Obierika’s daughter, Akueke, represents the expectation of each Igbo community in every occasion where marriage rites are initiated. He says: “I hope our in-laws will bring many pots of wine. Although they come from a village that is known for being close-fisted, they ought to know that Akueke is the bride for a king.” And Okonkwo adds in the same scene, “They dare not bring fewer than thirty pots” (93). One may adduce that the said wealth to which the female names point is meant for the celebration of the occasion of marriage.

The breakdown in the regard for marriage today, may be linked with some values that indict the negative traces of civilization. In emphasizing that it is from the family unit that the process of initiation and integration into the communality of the Igbo society begins, it is pertinent to see how the value for marriage (with the inauguration of the family), bears its own consequence on the larger society. Certain sociolinguistic interpretations of such names as Akunna (father’s wealth), Akueke (wealth/worth of the python), Akumefule (may my wealth not be lost), Egondudu (money/wealth of life); leaning more on feminist temperaments have berated the Igbo culture for reducing the woman (daughter) to items to be possessed by the man (father). When these daughters marry, they are seen to be transferred to the man (husband).

In *Arrow of God*, Achebe portrays Ezeulu’s mood when there was a glimmer in the prospects of resolving the altercation between Akueke and her husband – “Ezeulu was grateful to

Ulu for bringing about so unexpectedly the mending of the quarrel between Akueke and her husband. He was sure that Ulu did it to put him in the right mind for purifying the six villages before they put their crops into the ground" (AOG, 63). Peace within the family unit as well as the larger society becomes vital in the people's prosperity and wellbeing.

In spite of the justifiable demand for Okonkwo to extricate himself from the indolence-induced poverty which characterized his father Unoka, it was the obsession with ambition that became his undoing. The killing of Ikemefuna, in utter disregard for the warning by Ogbuefi Ezeudu, is the first evidence of Okonkwo's extreme ambition. To have killed a boy that called him father in the bid to prove his manliness is not only inordinate but also most inhuman. The fact that he was banished for seven years even though the act of killing Ezeudu's son was inadvertent, demonstrates the sacrosanctity of life in the Umuofia philosophy. Yet, it is apparent that Achebe caricatures Okonkwo's dramatization of his exploits in securing human heads at the war front. The boys, Nwoye and Ikemefuna were not interested in Okonkwo's kind of stories: "So Okonkwo encouraged the boys to sit with him in his Obi, and he told them stories of the land – masculine stories of violence and bloodshed" (TFA, 42).

Okonkwo's ambition is also portrayed in the ruminations while still in the early period of serving his banishment in Mbaino:

Even in his first year in exile he had begun to plan for his return. The first thing he would do would be to rebuild his compound on a more magnificent scale. He would build a bigger barn than he had before and he would build huts for two new wives. Then he would show his wealth by initiating his sons into the ozo society...Okonkwo saw clearly the high esteem in which he would be held, and he saw himself taking the highest title in the land (TFA, 137).

Much earlier in *Things Fall Apart*, the elders had not only condemned the traces of pride in Okonkwo when he addressed Osugo as a woman, the eldest of them had suggested that such act could be a spiritual affront:

Everybody at the kindred meeting took sides with Osugo when Okonkwo called him a woman. The oldest man present said sternly that those whose palm-kernels were cracked for them by a benevolent spirit should not forget to be humble" (TFA, 21).

There is a comparative portrayal of pride and excessive ambitious dispositions of Okonkwo and Chief Ikedi. It was not exactly of the corrupt character of the latter, but a certain pursuit of survival which disregarded the rights of others. Achebe makes the Chief James Ikedi instance more offensive to the readers. Chief Ikedi's tyrannical rule over the Umuaro people was such that, in building the new road for the white man, they destroyed the homes of those who opposed his highhandedness using the white overseer. Indeed, when they came to report to him Chief Ikedi "told them there was nothing he could do; that the overseer was carrying out the orders of the white man" (57).

Conclusion

In seeking to interrogate the things that would not fall apart, the argument rests on the premise that art, education and family are connected elements in the process of learning, which also guarantee the full integration into the Igbo communality. The said communality also presupposes

the conviviality of the tripartite social order – political, religious and economic – which become the interrogation of culture. The socio-political structure remains one of the strong points in the perception of the cultural indices which Achebe presents in these custom-specific novels, *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*. Festivals are dramatized, just like the tale-telling performances. Little wonder, the production of *Things Fall Apart* as one of the earliest Nigerian home movies attracted much interest. The novels not only incite the dramatic, but much more, this impulse invokes a measurable acquaintance with the Igbo cosmology, borne in the choice of Achebe's setting and narrative technique. It is with such exposition that the Achebe-reader appreciates the full import of each dramatization.

Unobtrusively however, and probably without any particular design, the narrative at the opening paragraph of *Things Fall Apart* encapsulates, among other things, these three frames within the character of Okonkwo, indeed a clear representative of the Umuofia (Igbo) society. The political framing of culture is deducible in Okonkwo's elevation to the rank of titled men. His fame which "rested on solid personal achievements", is traceable to his physical strength and manifest victory in the fiercest wrestling contest of all times in Umuofia history. It is this victory that translates into the honour he had brought his village, and which had contributed in preparing him for taking the revered titles in Umuofia. The fact that the mention of his accomplishments may be seen from other successes that are not restricted to power, the name *oko nkwo* given to a male born on the *Nkwo* is symbolic. *Nkwo* is one of the four days in the traditional calendar which Nzewuba Ugwu identifies as depicting certain shades of Igbo cosmology, especially of markets and the involvements of deities.

The market calendar system is also symbolic of the Igbo consciousness of trading/economic activities. It relates how such engagements implicate the fate and destiny of the people involved. Therefore naming a child with any of the given market days (Eke, Orie, Afor or Nkwo) on which such child is born is an attempt to represent his destiny within the movement of the cosmic elements that pre-implicate fate. Again, the testimony of the elders which is particularly religious, is that the wrestling match which Okonkwo won "was one of the fiercest since the founder of their town engaged a spirit of the wild for seven days and seven nights" (*TFA*, 3). In spite of being identified in this discourse within the frames of the political, the religious and the economic, it has been observed that these three planes of cultural perception are almost always so connected that the success in one sphere generates a positive outcome in the other(s) and *vice versa*.

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