

CULTURAL STANDARDS AND METHODS OF PERCEPTION IN IGBA OGBOLE'S *ARROWS OF ANGUISH*

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Abstract

This study sets out to examine cultural standards and methods of perception in Igba Ogbole's *Arrows of Anguish*. As a result of colonialism and the erroneous belief that Africans have no culture of their own, Igba Ogbole sets out to highlight the cultural patterns of his people. He utilizes his novel as the stance to delineate the ways of life of Oladam people as well as their worldview. He conveys his feelings and themes with much ingeniousness that the reader sees him as a skilled craftman with subliminal approach; the cultural mores depict him as one who is connected to his society. He shows that his duty as a writer is to show that Africa has solid culture of their own even before the coming of the whitemen. What gives Ogbole's narrative validity is his use of proverbs and other local speech patterns to send his message across. Also, he uses proverbs to depict authenticity, situate the characters and showcase the richness in his dialect. He laments the obliteration of African cultural ways; he believes that if Africans can revive their positive cultures, they will boost national development. The study makes some recommendations which include: introduction of Cultural Studies in school curriculum, organizing cultural conferences and re-introduction of Festival of Arts and Culture among others.

Keywords: Africa, culture, revival, national development.

Introduction

In the present African society, there has been an upsurge in the rate of crimes and conflicts among the people unlike in the past when the Europeans have not set their feet on the African soil. They came and made Africans to believe that everything about Africa is primitive and weird. Thus, Africans are made to accept that our cultural ways are odd and

bizarre. The Europeans craftly came up with these erroneous impressions about Africa in order to deceive gullible African people which will enable them to plunder the resources in the continent. The aftermath of this inaccurate assessment of Africa is that Africans look with disdain on anything that is theirs and embrace European cultural ways and education. We go after European's food, answer English names, speak their language and abandon ours. We fail to realize that names, food and language are part and parcel of our identity.

The quest for the things of Europe and the scorn for the traditional African ways and values has tremendously affected African society. Some African writers like Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Daniel Mengara, Gabriel Okara, Okot P' Bitek, John Pepper Clark among others have used the medium of their works to lament the obliteration of the African ways. These writers try to show that there is beauty in our cultural ways. According to Kingsley Chiemela and Nnadi Ogechi, "writers of imaginative literature often respond in their works to the prevalent social realities of their day. In Africa, the end of art is not mere aesthetics... events and characters in real life provide the materials for shaping events and characters in literary works" (9). This shows that a work of art does not emanate from the moon, but from an observant artist who sets out to depict what goes on in his milieu, afterall, literature is a representation of man in his environment.

When existing social values are destroyed, immorality, corruption, bribery set in and one witnesses conflicts and disruption of social order. The whiteman's civilization although has some positive aspects, really destabilized Africa as a whole. Therefore, it is very important for writers to infuse culture in their writings so that the youths will understand where they are coming from. Culture differs from society to society and the elders teach the young ones the customs of the land. The problem is that some of these cultural practices have gone into extinction. When I was young, I watched some yearly festivals in my village like the ekpukele, owu, edere festivals among others; today they are never celebrated any longer. These are celebrations that promote communal unity and wellbeing, a feeling of pride and social interactions. Although culture is said to be dynamic, some positive cultural ways can be preserved to boost national development. Language is the carrier of the cultural identity of a people, therefore, our local languages should be promoted and revived.

The colonial encounter has made the colonized people to characterize their culture; a writer's knowledge and ability to express his

cultural patterns while infusing his dialectical inheritance remain a form of advancement for any writer. In the same vein, when a society is culturally connected, they will agree to stipulated values and beliefs. Ngugi wa Thiong'o remarks that, writers record the "tensions, conflicts, contradictions at the heart of a community's being and process of becoming, it is a reflection at the ... Environment to produce basic needs of life, food, clothing, shelter and in the process creating and recreating history" (19). This means that there is a glaring bond between a people and their cultural ways. According to Wole Soyinka, "a concern with culture strengthens society. The artist has always functioned in African society as the recorder of mores and experience of his society and the voice of vision in his own time" (qtd. In *NCE/DLS Course Book* 250). This depicts that the writers of any age help in the evolution and advancement of culture. The legendary tales, proverbs, parables among others from traditions have provided writers with themes in their literary works. Therefore, in a bid to revitalize the African culture through their imaginative works, writers contribute in national development.

Culture means the ways of life of a people, their belief system, customs and manner of doing things like dressing, songs, dance, mode of worship, language and so on. These are handed down from generation to generation. It also includes the norms and laws of particular society; culture dictates how people live their lives; it differentiates one community from another. Nicki Lisa Cole remarks that "culture is a term that refers to a large and diverse set of mostly intangible aspects of social life... Communication, and practices that people share in common and that can be used to define them as a collective. Culture also includes the material objects that are common to that group or society..." (<http://www.thoughco.co>) Culture plays a crucial role in the sustenance of social order. There will be security because there are laid down rules and regulations to be adhered to by the members of a given society; there is understanding and cooperation among members because they respect the cultural ways that join them together which at the same time boost social bonding. Considering how important culture is to a country, Lt. General Olusegun Obasanjo the former Head of State of Nigeria came up with FESTAC – Second Black Festival of Arts and Culture in 1977 which will help Africans to promote African culture in the world. It is aimed at promoting cultural consciousness and revival as well as boosting African heritage, values and aspirations. Also, FESTAC was aimed at renewal of

culture and at the same time show to the Western World that Africa has solid and admirable culture of their own.

Culture can be observed from the way a community live their lives. Ahamadu states that “culture refers to people’s way of life and to human activity shaped by experience and action ... accepted mode of life as reflected in arts, development, enlightenment, education and tools which are prone to adaptation and change. (<http://afribary.com/works...>). The cultural ways of a society are handed down from one epoch to another. Every community has ideas and values and they help them in the advancement of their society. According to Dienyi Victory et al, for any society to thrive, “there must be cultural values that would be generally accepted as binding forces to all concerned ... these cultural values and virtues are the basic elements of a united, peaceful and integrated society and are universally accepted as ideal” (211). These values help people to live harmoniously and they become their basis and reasons for existence. If the cultural environment of any community is taken for granted or violated, there will be disunity and conflicts. No community can thrive in the absence of defined, holistic and positive ideals.

Textual Explication

Arrows of Anguish portrays a cultural peculiarity and the novelist sets out to demonstrate that the strength of the people lies in those components that are mooted in the narrative. The Ikpo age grade, council of elders, the laws of the land, belief system, oratory patterns among others are the elements that are broached into the narrative to sustain cohesion. Despite the challenges faced by the natives, the idolizing atmosphere is what gives the setting a semblance of a rural novel. The people believe so much in the power of the gods, the efficacy of the oracles, the protective nature of the ancestors like Alekwu Chief Priest, Ukwuagidigi, the Chief priest of Udenumoko oracle among others. There is traditional punishments that are meted out to people who go contrary to the laws of the land. People are afraid to do evil in order not to attract the anger of the gods of the land and the people. Taiwo Oladokun reveals that, “culture is the most definitive element of any people ... civilization upon civilization ... Culture is the very fabric and essence that wield people together” (21). The novelist uses his narratives as the stance to disapprove of the crumbling cultural ways of the people. There is the need to revive those culture to boost national development.

Furthermore, the novel is brimmed with much pessimism, tragedy and despondency. The author bemoans the corroding and eroding culture of the people, for instance, the hunting expedition, the biannual ej' Alekwu festival of the rainy season which parades masquerades of different kinds and celebrates ancestral spirits (30). The king sees their past as an era when life is lucid and cloying but, their existence starts disintegrating when "anguish appeared to have simply crept upon his domain while the populace slept" (30). It becomes so devastating that "even the lush green vegetation which Oladam was known was now regrettably giving way to a nondescript phenomenon" (31) and the raconteur believes that it is pernicious and cataclysmic as the dangerous wind that has sneaked into their community while destroying the people and the environment at a gruesome manner which they have not seen even in primordial times. The natives suffer calamity after calamity not noticed in primeval days. The people are resolved into finding the cause of these problems and fight them.

In an intriguing and riveting manner, the author presents the king's passage. As Adama breaks the news of the King's death, the elders exclaimed that "the bird's potent cure for the snake's illness was delivered after the snake's death" (137). This refers to the futility of their effort in search of the King's cure. To them, the King has gone on a trip. They know that "the lion of Oladam" has departed. Metaphorically, the King is the lion and Iroko that has fallen. Although the chiefs convey their condolences to Ojechema, they believe that King Unugbo has not died. The King is celebrated in life as well as in death. According to the narrator,

In Oladam cosmology, a king never dies. Before Unugbo assumed office, he went through symbolic death and burial. He had died to family, friends and all other human relations. Belonging to everyone and to no one, he became the property of all his subjects for whom he was bound to provide without discrimination. After his token death, Unugbo was bound like a corpse and subjected to all the other processes involved in an actual burial, after which his symbolic resurrection was staged. Having returned from the land of the dead, he was henceforth assumed to have acquired greater wisdom and powers to reign ... he was reckoned as no more a mere mortal but more of a spirit being (137).

Based on the explication above, the symbolic death ascribes the qualities of a superhuman to the king as well as diminishing the power of death, the king assumes the value of a deity. Therefore, the king never dies since he will still come back to life. Besides, he is taught by the gods of the land and the ancestral spirits. In preparation for a new king, Alekwu Chief priest will conduct the cleansing rites in the palace; the belongings of the new king will be given out to the people to show that he is now the burden of the community. It is presumed that the old king has gone on infinite journey. The council of elders will now sharpen the King's cutlass, arrows, bows and dane gun for efficacy, then, they will wish him a fruitful hunting expedition (137). This journey will transit him from human to a spiritual being. This is the reason the King is looked upon with awe and nobody challenges his action.

Chief Ijeh is presented as an over-ambitious saboteur who works against his people in their bid to achieve security in Oladam. He takes bribes from herders and give out information on how to attack his community. People and elders are surprised that a titled member of the community can betray them, thus, his 'treachery and betrayal was a topic on everyone's lips and it spread across the land like harmattan fire' (89). The consequence of this abominable act is that he can be stripped of his chieftaincy title. The people believe that he is a wealthy man who should not use their enemies to make money.

The natives feel that Oladam has been desecrated and needs ritual cleansing. For such evil, the women organize "a sit-in protest at the palace" until he is sent on exile. Since he denies his sabotage, he is expected to go with the council of elders to Udenumoko grove, the home of spirits to swear an oath (95). However, it is in this forest that complex disputes are settled. With the way the laws of the land are, people are very careful not to go contrary to them because they know how powerful the gods are. As a result of that, offenders are punished in order to maintain an orderly society. Nobody is above the law, therefore, offenders must get their punishments no matter who is involved.

Having banished Chief Ije from Oladam, the warlock cannot see his face clearly. Therefore, "that mask of thick black blood" is all the enchanter can see with his spiritual eyes. Thus, the mask symbolizes the death of Ije who has been expatriated to another land. Africans have the fixation that the gods are all –powerful and can predict ominous situations to come. According to Idoga Ogodo's father, "the Alekwu oracle never lied" (103). Also, to maintain peace, any native who kills another will carry

out land cleansing which will be conducted by Alekwu Chief Priest on an Eke market day. This helps to maintain sanity in the land.

The author adopts his narrative as the vantage point to criticize obnoxious cultural practices of some communities that stipulate carrying back their dead daughters to be buried in their parents' homes. He emphasizes that the practice is archaic and very unfair to the husband and children of a dead woman (20). Conversely, the narrator reiterates that in terms of family bequeath, daughters are not allowed to inherit their parents' property or those of their husbands. They claim that burying a woman in her parents' home will establish a bond between them and the deceased's children who will be visiting their mother's graveside. The novel foregrounds the fleeting nature of life, "death comes ... like an armed robber in the night" (2). Also, much respect is accorded to the dead in the course of burial.

The author in an authentic voice records the actions in his fictional society, a firm belief in superstition, the potency of the gods and their attendant edicts and permission to carry out these decrees. In Oladam, tradition forbids a man from seeing all the rituals that are carried out when performing the passage rites of his wife because he may be killed "by the old husband – wife bond" (3). Also, the owl flying in the daytime or flying over a person's head is a symbol of disaster to come and that is the reason why Adache is terrified because of his encounter with an owl; his heart beats "as if yam was being pounded in a mortar placed on his chest" (17) and as he gets to his house, "his legs wobbled like a drunk struggling to balance himself". (17). Thus, his fear is confirmed when his wife is confirmed dead.

In addition, Adache feels that the cock crowing near his lover's bedroom is an indication that the spirit of his late wife and those of the gods are joined together to seek his hurt. To him, there is something ominous with the pertinacious cries of the cock. He sees it as strange and horrendous. Also, the chameleon is seen as sacred; killing it portends danger to whoever commits the sacrilege. It is an important totem and dangerous for anyone who sees it change its colour (24). The chameleon's slow movement is an expression of its sacredness and "lack of concern for anything in its environment". The people have this adage that the chameleon cannot change its colour even if the bush around is burning. This means that the people cannot bend their laws no matter who is involved.

Also, when a person is attacked in a dream by a masquerade, it portends danger looming ahead. According to Emilia Oko, the writers of this present century unlike of the old, are excellent, proficient and their greatness lies in their “understanding of their society and transmitting them through art. They form the tradition that is Western and African ... but more important is their ability to see rationalization not in Western terms but in the effect capital and materialism has on an integrated African communal situation” (108). This goes a long way to show that Europeans’ intrusion in Africa devastated its people and the way they live and their way of life.

The author sets out to highlight what binds the society together and promotes healthy coexistence. There is the use of imagery, the horsetail symbolizes attention and solemnity during council of elders’ meetings while the ancient royal totem represents authority of the throne. Ogbole has excelled in his indepth depiction of the daily existence of those who live in the fictional community, their pains and aspirations; this he achieves through plot arrangement and character delineation. The novelist shows that corruption is never the swiftest mode of wealth acquisition and upward mobility and this he portrays through the representation of Chief Ijeh whose wealth is procured through ritual.

Having observed the colonial masters’ perception that Africa has no culture, they are savages, Ogbole sets out to delineate the beauty of the cultural life of his people. He highlights the beauty of Ukwo market festival which is like a carnival and the people long for it because it offers them the opportunity of meeting members of their age grade, interact with in-laws while some others come to look for young men and women to marry. Ukwo market is significant in the sense that it connects the people and helps in their developments. In the same manner, members of the community contribute to the development of Oladam and anyone who refuses to do so is placed under *Oshi*. This means that they cannot bury any of the victim’s relation in the community (35). Any person who goes against Oladam’s tradition suffers it. All the people who undermine the traditional ethos suffer one calamity or the other, for instance, Chief Ije is banished because he goes contrary to the laws of the land.

Furthermore, the people believed so much in the power of their gods, for instance, they consult Ogolekwu in a bid to find solutions to the problems plaguing Oladam. Adache wants mystic powers to challenge those fighting his community while Ogolekwu promises to “boil him” to enable him transcend human destruction. This mystic adventure will have

negative effect on him but, he is willing to sacrifice himself for his people. Thus, he becomes a savior in the cultural mythology like Jesus Christ did. In like manner, writers have offered their services during turbulent times through their works to criticize obnoxious policies of the government and this has earned them series of arrests and detentions. Amilcar Cabral states that, “culture enables us to know what dynamic synthesis have been formed and set by social awareness in order to resolve these conflicts at its stage of evolution of that society in the search for survival and progress” (486).

Through Ogbole’s revelations in *Arrows of Anguish*, he assents to Achebe’s firm assertion that, “the worst thing that can happen to any people is the loss of their dignity and self-respect. The writer’s duty is to help them regain it by showing them in human terms what happened to them, what they lost ... it is to explore in depth the human condition. In Africa he cannot perform this task unless he has a sense of history”. (qtd.in Ogunbesan 38). The author uses his work to expose the cultural as well as the psychological strains facing the people and the need for the people to revitalize their culture for national development.

Additionally, the writer highlights the efficaciousness of the African traditional medicine over the modern medicine. He reveals that there are some illnesses that can defy the contemporary medicine but can be treated with traditional ones. Chief Abah Ogbaje in support of the orthodox means reiterates that, “our people have a saying that there’s no knot tied by human hand that cannot be untied (sic) by another human hand” (135). In support of this, king Unugo’s doctor advises him to seek the help of a traditional healer. It is believed that the king’s affliction is coming from the spirit world and needs customary means of treatment rather than the modern medicine.

Recommendations

This study recommends the following:

- Cultural studies should be introduced and taught as a school subject in the primary, secondary and tertiary institutions.
- The Festival of Arts and Culture introduced by Rtd. Lt. General Olusegun Obasanjo in 1977 should be re-introduced to promote African cultural heritage.

- There should be conferences on cultural values involving the major ethnic groups in Nigeria at the state and national levels. This will encourage unity and eradicate religious intolerance.
- The pre-colonial history of Nigeria should be integrated in the Nigerian school curriculum.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has been able to analyse cultural modes and the strategies of their perceptions in Igba Ogbole's *Arrows of Anguish*. The novelist tries to demonstrate that the people of Africa have solid and impressive culture from time immemorial and the idea of culture did not emanate from the Europeans. These cultural ways can be revived to build a vibrant society. There exists a great relationship between culture and society and the restoration of cultures will encourage unity, harmony and religious permissiveness in the nation. It is in the pursuit of European ways that the African cherished cultural values which aid togetherness have gone into oblivion. Since these cultural ways have sustained our communities in the past, there is the need to revitalize and integrate these elements of culture into the modern time in order to build a dynamic, vigorous and peaceful society.

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