

Colonial Subversion of Indigenous Cultures : Reading Achebe's *Arrow of God*

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A symbiotic relationship existed between culture and imperialism, as each aided the spread of the other. Along with commerce and geographical annexation, the colonizer eroded the indigenous cultures of the natives. However, the culture that promoted imperialism also produced resistance on the part of the colonized. The paper studies the resistance, as manifested in Achebe's novel Arrow of God which takes place through questioning of stereotypes and retelling of the history. The native needs to assert his cultural identity but it becomes impossible for him to regain the pure and authentic identity, for the foreign culture has already usurped into the pure. Thus he is pushed into the third space and occupies a liminal position.

If the advent of British imperialism was one of the most appalling occurrences of the eighteenth century, then dismantling of the Empire was one of the most notable events of the twentieth century. A better understanding of colonialism, however, drives home the fact that it was not merely about conquering territories round the globe and neither did the independence of colonies mean the end of imperialism. In fact, colonialism/imperialism was, among other things, about channeling energies in order to bring home greater wealth and easy recognition. And, decolonisation resulted in political independence of the colonies, while the cultural subjugation still continues.

Imperialism was motivated by the capitalistic interest and was justified as a civilizing mission, whereby it was considered to be the moral duty of the 'enlightened' beings to carry the torch into the darker regions. But more so, while acquiring legitimacy for the enterprise in the name of civilising the savages, there was a need to represent the colonial subjects as one and, thus, rob them of their identity. The colonial discourse came to be based on certain ideological assumptions and the same were reiterated through different media over a period of time, as Homi Bhabha puts in: "There is a conspiracy of silence around the colonial truth, whatever that might be" (Bhabha, Location 123).

In fact, within the colonial discourse, there exist underpinnings of this perennial conflict between 'self' and 'other', with the colonizer trying not only to construct the 'other' in order to define the 'self', but also getting trapped, in the process, in the polemics of binaries. An identity of 'self' is established by misconstruing the 'other' but a dialogue, which is partly overt and partly internal, with other is generated within the political and cultural realm of a society and at times is imposed through political as well as cultural mechanisms. And, it is this dialectical relationship that problematises the idea of an integrated identity for a colonizer. Similarly, the colonized looks up to his colonizer while he is being robbed of his own native identity. And, when he begins to assert his indigenous identity, he realizes that it is already fractured, as a result of the influences of the colonizer.

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Keeping this in view, my paper examines the ambiguous identity of the colonized through the study of Chinua Achebe's novel *Arrow of God*. The politics of recognition constantly pushes any sense of integrated identity towards liminality. Instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think of identity as a 'production', which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside representation (Williams and Chrisman 392).

Identity is seen as a cultural and social construct, which signifies not 'who we are' but 'how have we been represented'. Therefore, identities are produced as a result of exclusionary project within and through the play of representations, as Stuart Hall affirms that "it is only through the relation to the Other, the relation to what it is not, to precisely what it lacks, to what has been called its constitutive outside that the positive meaning of any term—and thus its identity— can be constructed" (Hall and du Gay 4). This relationship of difference that is essential for the establishment of an identity is developed within the power politics and, therefore, contests the belief of identity as something natural and unified. Indeed, identity is all about positioning of subjects through representations that are ideologically constructed.

The colonizer represented the 'other' merely as objects, lacking any history or entity. The colonizer projects and represents the native so that he becomes a counter foil to the colonizer's image. Thus, it is vital for the colonized subjects to rediscover their past and to unveil their cultures, while setting right the facts that have been misrepresented. The idea of having a common and shared history offers a sense of identity, which is celebrated by the disbanded individuals of the colonized state. The narration of the past, in order to remodel and reshape the distorted reality regarding the colonized subjects ends up in the production of yet another identity. Even so, a pure or unified selfhood is no longer feasible as identity is not some sort of embodiment but different positioning of the subjects. Applying Derrida's concept of 'differance', it becomes apparent that just like meaning, which differs and defers at the same time, identity is also arbitrary and cannot be confined to some boundary. Indeed, the meaning keeps evolving while the traces of the previous are left behind. When the colonized is made to believe that everything that is being offered by the colonizer is beneficial to his existence, the colonized native silently 'adopts' everything that is foreign and is comfortable with the idea of assimilation. He does not question, for his silence symbolizes his ignorance about himself. At the same time, silence is a metaphor of a passive protest. Though silent, the colonized native refuses to accept in totality the supremacy of the colonizer in a positive sense and he struggles within himself, though the struggle is at a liminal level. This internal conflict comes to the surface when he begins to have a sense of detachment from everything that belongs to the colonizer, including his own representation. He becomes nostalgic about his forgotten indigeneness in the process of adopting the ways of his master. The detachment, however, is not complete. He is not in a position to completely give up the newly adopted culture nor can he fight the urge of the historical and cultural recovery his own past. Thus, he tries to 'adapt' to the two conflicting cultures. Nonetheless, there is a desire on the part of the colonized to become equal to his master but, at the same time, he attempts to show his existence through manifestation and assertion of his indigenous characters. However, somewhere in the process, the idea of pure, authentic and unified identity as a colonized native is lost. The interaction between the colonizer and the colonized goes beyond the

paradigms of power and knowledge. There are other categories and gaps between the two extremes. Colonial discourse, thus, can be seen as :

[A]n apparatus that turns on the recognition and disavowal of racial/cultural/historical differences. Its predominant strategic function is the creation of a space for a 'subject peoples' through the production of knowledges in terms of which surveillance is exercised and a complex form of pleasure/unpleasure is incited (Bhabha 70).

The colonized tries to mimic his master but ends up becoming an unauthentic replica of the colonizer while losing the indigenous cultural identity. Thus, a species of hybrid beings is created. Moreover, mimicry turns into mockery with an element of menace. In the process, the agenda of power is subverted and along with an element of suffering on the part of the colonized native, there is also some amount of slyness that creeps in his relationship with the colonizer—"The menace of mimicry is its double vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority" (Bhabha 88).

Achebe's novel *Arrow of God* conveys the fact that the native struggles to authenticate his identity but, as a result of the colonial process, the indigenous identity has been blended with shades of colonizer's culture. In this novel, an attempt is made to construct a national identity through recollection of a common past. The author tries to assert the fact that culture was something never found lacking among the African. Yet, the traces of a foreign culture cannot be completely wiped away, thus, making it difficult for the native to acquire a unified identity.

The subalterns no longer accept the metropolitan authority silently; rather they begin to defy it by asserting their indigenous cultural identity. This resistance, however, is not to be understood merely as a rebellion against an alien culture but also as an impelling necessity to manifest their supposedly demeaned existence. The native, in fact, struggles on the one hand to claim an independent identity and on the other, attempts to break free of the hegemony of the colonizer and his culture. Thus, there is a conflict as far as the identity of the colonized is concerned.

In order to assert one's identity, it becomes important to show one's history to which the Orient was never entitled. Chinua Achebe's novel attempts at correcting the fallacies about Africa and its people and, at the same time, his work throws light on the ambiguous situation that the native is put into as a result of colonialism. His primal concern is not so much the historical problems as their impact on the actual life of the people. In fact, everything about igbomen—their hopes, aspirations, desires and disappointments—alters in the wake of historical and political changes, which is skilfully captured in Achebe's work.

Recognizing the relationship between European imperialism and the European myths of Africa, Achebe conceives his writing as a counter-discourse through which he participates in Africa's quest for self-reconstruction. According to Achebe the association of Europe with Africa goes back several ages:

"The relationship between Europe and Africa is very old and special. The coasts of North Africa and Southern Europe interacted intimately to produce the beginnings of modern European civilization. Later, and much less happily, Europe engaged Africa in the tragic misalliance of the slave trade and colonialism to lay the foundations of modern European and American industrialism and wealth." (Achebe, *Hopes* 22).

There arises a need to educate the native about his own existence, which is as meaningful as that of

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the subjugator. It thus becomes necessary to fashion ideologies and approaches in order to inculcate the feeling of self-respect among the demeaned natives. Achebe explains: "You have all heard of the African personality; of African democracy, of the African way to socialism, of negritude. And so on. They are all props we have fashioned at different times to help us get on our feet again. Once we are up we shan't need any of them any more"(Achebe, *Morning...* 44). What Africa needed was emancipation from the stereotypes that have time and again been reiterated in and through the master narratives.

However, in the exercise of establishing the native or indigenous identity the colonized subject cannot wash his hands off the hegemony of the colonizer. In other words, the colonized subject can no longer be in possession of a pure and unadulterated native identity. On the one hand, Achebe's novel brings out the idea of resistance, whereby the 'silence' on the part of the 'inert' and 'retarded' natives of Africa is converted into a resistance, not necessarily violent, but which enables them to struggle free off the shackles of ideologically constructed and essentialised stereotypes. On the other hand, it portrays the assimilation of Western/colonizer's culture with indigenous culture, depriving the native of an absolute and a pure identity.

Consequently, the colonized identity occupies the third space and the native becomes a hybrid being. It is the inbetweenness that defines the colonized subject, as he is no longer in possession of an absolute identity. *Arrow of God* typifies this condition of the colonized subject, who finds himself in the liminal territory. The novel traverses different trajectories. On the one hand, it repudiates the notion of 'white man's burden' by reinvigorating the African culture and its history, yet Achebe does not completely contest the infiltration of the colonizer's culture. On the other, it brings out subtle influences of the colonizer and his culture, as a result of which the native begins to have doubts about age-old beliefs he had been living by and looks up to this new and better culture that has come to his land to redeem him. The colonized identity, thus, oscillates between two cultural poles, like a pendulum.

Arrow of God is a part of the trilogy, beginning with *Things Fall Apart* and closing with *No Longer at Ease*, which traces the impact of colonialism on a native tribe of Africa and the reaction and responses of the native. The work also highlights the authority of the written word over realities contained in oral knowledge. The Western documentations, whether it is history writing or a literary piece, is never verified but regarded as the final word, the final verdict that cannot be challenged. The African novel attempts at re-documentation of the African history. The oral tradition that had been altogether disregarded by the Western historiography is revived through the written word. The African novel in English, indeed, challenges the European authority and its word. Achebe had initially wondered about texts like *Heart of Darkness* and *Mister Johnson* but finally concludes: "There is such a thing as absolute power over narrative. Those who secure this privilege for themselves can arrange stories about others pretty much where, and as, they like." (Achebe, *Home* 24) The colonizer had the power of the word, the language and was the narrator of the stories that belonged to others. Thus, the truths were constructed and facts were manipulated and imperialist designs were justified. Achebe's work aspires to narrate the real story and carry forward the knowl-

edge that was handed down through oral tradition of telling stories, recitations and songs; and thereby creating a written account of the post-colonial African experiences. *Arrow of God* is a political and cultural novel, set in Nigeria in the early twentieth century when colonization by British government officials and Christian missionaries was well underway. Two contrasting cultures confront each other in the novel and Achebe portrays the disrupting effect that an external system (the British) has on the indigenous life. Conflicts within the Igbo society coupled with repercussions from external invasion result in disaster for the Igbo society, which disintegrates from within and tries to reorient itself to the new religion, Christianity. This reorientation not only leads to assimilation of the Western values and beliefs, but also results in the eventual loss of the Igbo cultural identity.

Achebe is able to present the ambivalence regarding the identity of the colonized in the most skilful manner, as he has experienced a similar life. He describes his childhood in a village where Christians and non-Christians were noticeably divided, where he as a child of staunch Christian parents was taught to look down on people, who were worthless :

“Both my parents were strong and even sometimes uncompromising in their Christian beliefs, but they were not fanatical. Their lives were ruled, I think, as much by reason as by faith; as much by common sense and compassion as by doctrine.” (Achebe, Home 10).

Achebe’s father had joined the church as a young man and had become a church teacher, while his maternal grandfather was the titled personage who first allowed the Christians to function from his compound until their singing became too doleful. However, despite their religious differences, the two men remained close to each other in a way, which Achebe found intense, touching and puzzling. They, in fact, communicated easily across the different values and cultures, which were beginning to divide the Igbo world. Achebe feels that he was living at the crossroads of cultures, which gave an unusual quality and ambience to his life.

Nevertheless, his education called his attention to European values, customs and accomplishments. The African way of life was generally considered inferior. The imperial take-over was not limited to education alone but had trickled into the daily lives of the people to such an extent that an English Maypole dance was preferred to traditional Igbo dancing at an important ceremony. The colonized subject is caught between the hegemony of the imperial culture and the urging need to break free from the shackles of the essentialised stereotypes. Yet, it is impossible for the native to maintain a single position. He can not be fully converted into something altogether different, without possessing traces of his indigenous identity. As a result, he finds himself in a state of inbetweenness. In *Arrow of God*, Achebe focuses on the task of correcting the misconceptions about Africa and in the process brings out various aspects of the Black culture. Indeed, the novel is a re-writing of history and a reaction to the centre. Achebe’s earnest desire has been to facilitate a sort of re-evaluation of his culture that has been branded as inferior, if not completely non-existent. Also, it is the cultural form of novel-writing to which the colonized resorts in order to express the idea of possessing sovereignty and attempting to establish one’s own identity while challenging the totalising impulses of the dominant culture. *Arrow of God* endeavours to re-construct the identity, but finally suggests that it is impossible to recuperate an absolute identity, which had been eroded by imperialism. The author carries forward the project of defining cultural identity by unveiling its cultural anthropology. At the

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same time, he hints at the vulnerabilities of the African system, which makes it an easy target for the enforcement of the civilizing mission. Achebe believes that as a writer it becomes his duty to "help my society regain belief in itself and put away the complexes of the years of denigration and self-abasement" (Achebe, *Hopes* 44).

In order to establish the independence of African literature, and to demonstrate the value of traditional African culture, Achebe deals with one group of people, the Igbo tribe of Nigeria. Igbo life and society has been presented in all its facets in order to reiterate the fact that culture or civilization was not something new for the Blacks. Achebe reevaluates African history by recuperating the traditions and customs of the pre-colonial society. His work reviews the facts about Africa that have been wrongly sketched in the European and Western writings. Also, he looks at the devastating impingement of imperialism on an indigenous culture.

The study of Igbo's social set-up reveals that reality is quite contrary to what has been projected by the Europeans. It would, no doubt, be true to say that the Igbo tribe did not have a well-defined tribal consciousness, but this does not mean that they lacked it completely. Igbo tribe is not centralized by any social institutions or power-chiefs, and this must be regarded as a positive aspect of their society. Power, in fact, is divided among number of small groups. This helps in the diffusion of authority instead of its concentration in the hands of a few people. In order to achieve this, the social set-up is divided into small local communities and "the basic social unit is the patrilineage, which usually occupies a single hamlet made of several homesteads or compounds" (Carroll 13). A single compound would consist of the houses of man and his wives and sons along with the unmarried daughters, living together within that compound. "Each lineage is under the moral authority of its senior member, the okpara, whose staff of office symbolises the authority of the ancestors with which he is invested. A number of lineages occupying a group of hamlets make up a village which is autonomous in most matters" (Carroll 13).

The social structure of the Igbo society is such that there cannot be a pyramid formation as far as the power or authority is concerned. In fact, it is the prototype of a democratic set up where all the individuals of a village are able to participate in the decisions and running of the affairs of the community.

In the world view of the Igbo, the individual is unique; the town is unique. How do they bring the competing claims of these two into some kind of resolution? Their answer is a popular assembly that is small enough for everybody who wishes to be present to do so and to "speak his own mouth", as they like to phrase it (Achebe, *Home* 17).

The people are free to express their views and give their opinions on any issue concerning the village and their lives. Thus, there prevails a pluralistic rather than a unitary system within the Igbo society "The society is a dynamic world of changing equilibrium in which the individual can manipulate his social relations by balancing his responsibilities in one group against his privileges in another. For the individual with drive and ambition this provides considerable freedom of action." (Carroll 14).

There are number of instances in *Arrow of God* that emphasise the central position of an individual in the socio-cultural life of the Igbo tribe and the practice of democracy at the grass roots. But the

colonizer is not appreciative of this social character as Captain Winterbottom, while explaining the state of affairs to Clarke, states: "...the Igbos never developed any kind of central authority. That's what our headquarters people fail to appreciate" (Achebe, *Arrow* 37). The approach of Africans towards the issues of property also shows that the community is given a superior position as compared to an individual. The land for cultivation and grazing would usually belong to the village as a whole but would be looked after by the village chief on behalf of the entire community. Each village would comprise of a small number of people who would jointly own the land and live together as a group.

At the same time, Achebe conveys the idea that though the individual forms the focal point of the Igbo society, there is a thin line that circumferences his limits. And, when the individual skips over that line, he is immediately checked by his own god :

"...to assert the worth of the individual by making him not the product of some ongoing, generic creativity but rather of a particular once-and-for-all divine activity is about as far as human imagination can go on the road of uniqueness." (Achebe, *Home* 16).

Also, Achebe strongly emphasises upon the individuality of the character to counter the portraiture in texts like Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Joyce Carry's *Mr. Johnson*. There is no denying the fact that a new culture and a new religion was imported into the African territory but the assumption that the civilization was being carried through colonialism to the lands of savages was overstating the facts. It was essential to oppose the racial discrimination entailed for imperial motive and bring the Black identity out of the imposed shadows of the essentialised stereotypes. Not only were the myths about the native of the Dark continent produced but also the culture and history of the indigenous population was either overlooked or adorned with adjectives like 'backward', 'barbaric', 'stagnant'. Achebe contrasts the stereotypical African characters in Western literature with complex and complicated human beings of Igbo society, which are as real as any English character and thus, doing justice to the race that had been condemned merely because of their dark coloured skin. As a corrective to European literature's essentialised portraits of Africans as a stagnant and primordial society, Achebe attempts to shed light on the human complexity of Nigerian existence. Achebe's protagonists cannot be written off as insignificant men who belong to pre-historic times. In fact, they have well determined characters and minds of their own. At the same time, they represent a people, a vision of life and a set of values.

In *Arrow of God*, the priest Ezeulu earnestly desires and endeavours to be a fine religious leader, but his pride and arrogance makes him deny the dictates of the changing times, making him incapable of acclimatizing with the new demands and necessities in the contemporary circumstances. Time shows the gradually increasing dominance of Christianity in his village and he feels completely helpless and out of place. Achebe's protagonist, who is in conflict between self-realisation and social responsibility, demonstrates the difficulty of reaching and sustaining equilibrium. The character's movement toward communal acceptance is thwarted by the destructive pull of the individual pride. Ezeulu is a man of great status, a king but not in the literal sense of the word. He, no doubt, is very powerful yet cannot take things for granted. He is not the absolute authority and can not become one for an individual, regardless of his greatness. The meaning of the term king in Igbo belief is to be understood as someone who is over-ambitious, unlike the European sense, which means that the ruler

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is at the top. For the Igbo people, king would imply for both material and political power. In fact, in Igbo society the titles were built in order to discourage people from becoming too powerful or too rich and to encourage them to trade that power and wealth against honours and titles. The chief priest is a man of courage and intellect but eventually gains the mistrust of his people. He is full of pride, strong and dictatorial in his private life. He is reticent and taciturn and most of the time angry either with his family or his clan. At times, he is obstinate to the point of irrationality. He lapses into vindictive silences, which are largely self-destructive. He eventually turns mad but is oblivious to his own tragedy. However, his tragic end does not bring spiritual development or some greater revelations of his inner self. Ezeulu, otherwise, is very strong-willed man, but is full of nobleness. He is intellectually quite agile and concerns himself with the causes and facts behind things. He understands and accepts the fact that the only thing that is permanent is change.

Thus, his reaction to the colonial intrusion is not very categorical. He is not strictly against the new religion and attempts at making compromises by allowing one of his sons to get converted. At the same time, one can comprehend this action as a shrewd move if the intention behind it was to acquire some kind of knowledge about the colonizer's religion in order to see through the designs of the colonizer and thereby, protect his and his clan's interests. But when his pride and dignity is attacked by the European authority, he cannot come to terms with it. While the society of Umuaro, on one hand, encourages individualism, on the other, it emphasizes communal unity :

“It seems to me that the Igbo people, recognizing the primary necessity for individual freedom, as well as the virtual impossibility of its practical realization in society, went out of their way to give the individual a cosmological head start in their creation series. In this way man might have something approaching a sporting chance in the game of life—an ability to hold his head up and declare, as the Igbo are wont to do, that no man should enter his house through another man's gate.” (Achebe, *Home* 17).

The tribe understood the fact that it is impossible for any one individual to become the supreme authority in a clan. So, they compromised by providing an individual with absolute dignity and self-respect, which is put in doubt with the coming in of the colonizer. The novel, however, shows a play between individualism and society, both regarded as equally important but neither is allowed to overpower the other.

Just as the equilibrium between different forces is essential for the smooth functioning of the society, the Igbo religion is also founded on a similar principle. Achebe brings out the infusing role of religion in Igbo community. In fact, religion intervenes at all levels of life, whether it is the domestic sphere or social events. The Igbo society, like any other society, also has its share of taboos and beliefs that are strictly followed by its people. For instance, the killing of the sacred python is not permitted and fighting is prohibited on the Nkwo market day. There are also some other beliefs that hint at the superstitious nature of the Igbos, like the medicine man is to be kept at a distance and the healing of the sick is to be done by driving out evil spirits through gunshots.

The Igbo people do believe in the supremacy of God Chukwu, whose abode is in the sky and is said to have control over fertility and creation. He is supposed to be the final recipient of all sacrifices,

which are made to the lower deities who form as mediators between the worshipper and the supreme God. The ancestors form a significant part of the Igbo world. They continue to live in the form of spirits, are responsible for the safety of their lineage and in return are honoured and worshipped with complete devotion. There is also the cult of personal gods. Each individual of the Igbo society is provided with his personal god, or Chi, on whom depends the destiny or the fate of the individual. The relationship between the individual and his Chi cannot be merely defined in terms of master-slave equation; rather one finds reverberation of duality within it. It is, in fact, the idea of duality that Achebe finds central to Igbo thought and philosophy.

In his essay “Chi in Igbo Cosmology”, Achebe brings to light two different meanings of the word Chi: “The first is often translated as god, guardian angel, personal spirit, soul, spirit-double, etc. The second meaning is day or daylight but most commonly used for those transitional periods between day and night or night and day” (Achebe, Morning 93). In order to understand the Igbo world-view it is essential to explore the nature of chi and its relationship with the Igbo man. Achebe states: “In a general way we may visualize a person’s Chi as his other identity in spirit land—his spirit being complementing his terrestrial human being; for nothing can stand alone, there must always be another thing standing beside it” (Achebe, Morning 93).

Once again, the importance and uniqueness of the individual is brought out in the concept of Chi. According to the Igbo belief, not only is each individual matchless and exceptional in his own way but his Chi is also unique. In other words, one can say that every man is a unique creation by a unique creator. This instils a sense of special individuality within each person. Nevertheless, absolutism can find no place in the Igbo world, whether it is the religion, relationship between the man and his Chi or the social functioning of the clan. Accordingly, the maxim is --“Wherever something stands, something else will stand beside it. Nothing is absolute”. In the Igbo thinking individuality of a person, although important, cannot overpower the will of the community. And when individualism begins to overpower the senses of a being, the person is no longer in communion with his outside cosmos. Also, the novel brings out the relationship between the man and his Chi (god), with a special message—“...no matter how strong or great a man was he should never challenge his Chi” (Achebe, Arrow 26). The title of the novel suggests a similar relationship—“The man who carries a deity is not a king. He is there to perform his god’s ritual and to carry sacrifice to him” (Achebe, Arrow 26-27). The individualism of the Igbo chief priest, a dominating character otherwise, begins to cross its limit and adds to the complications of the situation. His elder son Edego recollects his mother’s, (Eziulu’s death) and comments about his father :

“Ezeulu’s only fault was that he expected everyone—his wives, his kinsmen, his children, his friends and even his enemies—to think and act like himself. Anyone who dared to say no to him was an enemy. He forgot the saying of the elders that if a man sought for a companion who acted entirely like himself he would live in solitude.” (Achebe, Arrow 93).

This idea that “no man however great can win judgment against all the people” reverberates throughout *Arrow of God*. The over indulgence of one’s independence, as a result of his unique individuality, is checked by the ruling of the social group to which that person belongs. It is essential for the members of the community to keep in mind the fact that “nothing is totally anything”. Whether it is the material

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and physical world or the world of the dead and the spirits, there has to be a sense of balance through consistent interface between the two. Failure to achieve so would result in some kind of catastrophe and bring misfortune to the Igbo man.

With the coming of the new religion, Christianity, things become complicated. The natives are quite apprehensive about this new religion, which belongs to the new master. And, *Arrow of God* explores situations and circumstances when two contrasting religions are posed against one another as a result of which the tribe finds itself faced with a dilemma.

The church, the concrete symbol of the colonizer's religion is very near to Ezeulu's compound. It is, perhaps, symbolic of the fact the new religion has infiltrated into the community and is posing a challenge to the traditional faith and the position of its chief priest. Ezeulu is distracted by the sound of the new religion: "As he sat in his obi thinking of the Festival of the Pumpkin Leaves, he heard their bell: GOME, GOME, GOME, GOME, GOME. His mind turned from the festival to the new religion" (Achebe, *Arrow* 42).

The chief priest, who is representative of the clan, is quite perturbed by the alien religion. Although he is the upholder of the indigenous culture, yet he understands that it is wise to change with the times :

"The world is changing...I want one of my sons to join these people and be my eye there. If there is nothing in it you will come back. But if there is something there you will bring home my share. The world is like a Mask dancing. If you want to see it well you do not stand in one place. My spirit tells me that those who do not befriend the white man today will be saying had we known tomorrow." (Achebe, *Arrow* 46).

However, things do not workout the way Ezeulu had thought or wanted them to happen and there was more confusion and tension as a result of the developments that were taking place. He was, initially, quite hopeful that the assimilation of two cultures would benefit the tribe but gradually the things become problematic and chaotic :

"He is not sure what to make of it. At first he had thought that since the white man had come with great power and conquest it was necessary that some people should learn the ways of his deity. That was why he had agreed to send his son Oduche, to learn the new ritual...But now Ezeulu was becoming afraid that the new religion was like a leper. Allow him a handshake and he wants to embrace." (Achebe, *Arrow* 42-43).

The nature of colonial encounter cannot be simplified merely by placing it within the axis of power. In order to make imperialism a successful project, the white man encouraged the colonized subject to learn and imitate the ways of the master but this imitation is always short of the real. As Homi Bhabha maintains :

"Consequently, it problematizes the signs of racial and cultural priority, so that the 'national' is no longer naturalizable. What emerges between mimesis and mimicry is a writing, a mode of representation, that marginalizes the monumentality of history, quite simply mocks its power to be a model, that power which supposedly makes it imitable." (Bhabha 88).

The intentions of the colonizer are further pronounced when Ezeulu's son Nwafo interprets the

sound of the bell: "It is saying: Leave your yam, leave your cocoyam and come to church" (Achebe, Arrow 43). Ezeulu can see through this explanation passed on by Oduche to his brother and ponders for a while—" It tells them to leave their ham and their cocoyam, does it? Then it is singing the song of extermination" (Achebe, Arrow 43). His own daughter questions his decision of allowing his son to be converted and challenges the standing of the chief priest, both as an individual and the head of a clan when she invites him—"Father come and see what we are seeing. This new religion..." (Achebe, Arrow 43). Oduche had locked the "royal python" in the wooden box in order to prove his complete devotion for the new religion that he has adopted. According to the Igbo faith, killing a python is regarded as the biggest sin. Oduche is aware of the fact and does not want to earn the curse but the desire to please the new master is quite overwhelming. He believes that his family and clan would not come to know about the act, and thus he will not be the cause of annoyance, while on the other hand he will succeed in impressing the church teacher. He wishes to keep both the groups happy. Then there is Moses, who has been one of the earliest converts. He has seen both the worlds and dares to confront Mr. Goodcountry :

"I have been to the fountainhead of this new religion and seen with my own eyes the white people who bought it. So I want to tell you now that I will not be led astray by outsiders who choose to weep louder than the owners of the corpse...If you are wise you will face the work they sent you to do here and take your hand off the python...Nobody here has complained to you that the python has ever blocked his way as he came to church." (Achebe, Arrow 49).

In fact, there are two contrasting forces at play—European thought and African paganism; and the conflict between the two creates tension and disrupts order.

The natives wish to adopt and adapt the new lifestyle but cannot completely shed off their old ways. In fact, this uncertainty further prompts the native to take ambivalent position. He can no longer decide about his location. He feels uprooted and completely displaced. It is through cultural displacement and ambiguity that Achebe hints at the power politics that behind all endeavours of man. Achebe explores the designs of power as prevailing within the social set up of the Igbo tribe. The novel opens with the chief priest reflecting over the issue of power :

"Whenever Ezeulu considered the intensity of his power over the year and the crops and, therefore, over the people he wondered if it was real. It was true he named the day for the feast of the Pumpkin Leaves and for the New Yam feast; but he did not choose it. He was merely a watchman. His power was no more than the power of a child over a goat that was said to be his. As long as the goat was alive it could be his; he would find it food and take care of it. But the day it was slaughtered he would know soon enough who the real owner was. No! the Chief Priest of Ulu was more than that, must be more than that. If he should refuse to name the day there would be no festival—no planting and no reaping. But could he refuse? No chief priest had ever refused. So it could not be done. He would not dare." (Achebe, Arrow 3).

There are power conflicts that are implicit yet decisive to the way events take their course. Power play is active at various levels—between the individual and the community, man and his chi, colonizer and colonized and within the Igbo tribe. Ezeulu is the chief priest of Ulu, a god created at the time when six

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villages were combined together for the protection against slave raids and Ulu superseded all other older deities of the villages. Thus, Ezeulu is presented with supreme power. But gradually it seems that even his supremacy and authority needs to be protected from not only external but also internal pressures. He is obliged to shield his clan from foreign threats and also defend himself and his position against any sort of dissidence from within his tribe.

An internal conflict is brought out through the rivalry between Ezeulu and Nwaka. The latter is a rich chief and main adherent of Ezidemili, the chief priest of the deity Idemili, one of the deities that were displaced by Ulu. Although it would be hard to comment on the deities yet one finds that it is the followers who create the hierarchy and then struggle for upward mobility with desires of acquiring more and more power. Such rivalry also hints at the cracks that exist within the native tribe even before there is an assault from the outside. Ezeulu tries to make the best of the friendship struck between the colonial agent, Winterbottom and himself. He seems to have realized that it would be futile to sail against the direction of the blowing wind and wisdom demands that he should seek the interests of his clan and try to tune in with the changing times. However, his own people turn against him. He is left powerless and helpless. He is a failure as the chief priest and unable to check the colonial takeover.

The colonial power is also manifested through the instrument of language. Language forms a major part of the cultural machinery of a people - it is through their language that they express their folk tales, myths, proverbs, history. For this reason, the imperial powers invariably attempted to stamp out native languages and replace them with their own. But, after independence, the writers found it difficult to deal with the situation, as on the one hand, they could articulate in the colonial language well and on the other, they were to be criticized for using the colonizer's language to express their views. The situation was, therefore, quite ambivalent, not only for the medium but the language was also colonial. There were primarily two possible responses to this situation; one was complete rejection of the colonizer's language and the other was the subversion of it.

The use of the English language and literary forms by African (and other Third World) writers must be understood in the context of a larger social, political, and ideological dialogue between British, and particularly colonialist, literature on the one hand and ex-colonized writers of the Third World on the other. Faced by the colonialist denigration of his past and the present culture and consequently motivated by a desire to negate prior European negation of indigenous society, the African writer embarks on a program of regaining the dignity of self and society by representing them in the best instances, in a manner that he considers unidealized and more authentic (Iyasera 86) While Ngugi Wa Thiong'o had been advocating outright rejection of the colonialist language, believing that this rejection is central to the anti-imperialist struggle, Chinua Achebe has chosen the route of subversion rather than rejection. It is, in fact, the language of his writings that is made to bear the weight and carries the essence of a different experience. In doing so it becomes another language. Achebe uses the language of the colonizer to convey the Igbo experience. Yet, the idioms, proverbs and imagery of these books all invoke his Eastern Nigerian culture, forcing the reader to accept on Achebe's linguistic terms, the story that he wishes to tell and in the manner he adopts to narrate his story.

The colonial language, undoubtedly, became a hegemonic instrument in the hands of the colonizer

to make the natives believe that not only is their religion and culture backward but even their language cannot do them any good. Thus, it was essential to learn the superior language, the one of the mother country, England :

“Every colonized people—in other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality—finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation; that is with the culture of the mother country. The colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country’s cultural standards. He becomes whiter as he renounces his blackness, his jungle” (Fanon 18).

Achebe has consistently emphasized the value of language asserting the fact that human society could not subsist or function in the absence of speech. It is not merely a medium for conversation. Rather, it is a reservoir of the worldview, vision, ideas and understanding for a community. He states: I have always been fond of stories and intrigued by language—first Igbo, spoken with such eloquence by the old men of the village, and later English which I began to learn at about the age of eight. I don’t know for certain, but I have probably spoken more words in Igbo than English but I have definitely written more words in English than Igbo. Which I think makes me perfectly bilingual. Some people have suggested that I should be better off writing in Igbo. Sometimes they seek to drive the point home by asking me in which language I dream. When I reply that I dream in both languages they seem not to believe it (Achebe, *Hopes* 34).

In “The African Writer and the English Language”, Achebe ponders about the circumstances that forced English to be given the status of a national language in most parts of Africa. Achebe points out that it was as a result of British intrusion and occupation that nations in Africa were formed and Nigeria was one of them. However, Achebe reiterates the fact that people along with their cultural histories did exist even before they were grouped into geographical territories. In other words, nation states were created later but the cultural tools that are often used to define a nation and invoke feelings of nationalism already existed. And language, undoubtedly, is a very vital tool for the construction of national consciousness. Giving due credit to colonialism Achebe concurs: “But on the whole it did bring together many peoples that had hitherto gone their several ways. And it gave them a language with which to talk to one another. If it failed to give them a song, it at least gave them a tongue for sighing” (Williams 430).

Therefore, it would not be justified to label writers writing in English as unpatriotic or to disregard African literatures written in English, for the writers have been conditioned according to the prevailing system. The education system during the colonial times made it mandatory for the student to excel in English if they wanted to pursue studies beyond the primary level. The use of colonial language, English in case of Achebe, “produces a contradiction between, on the one hand, the unconscious and subconscious psychic formations of most Third World writers, determined by the indigenous languages, and, on the other hand, the more superficial, conscious formation, determined by the formal, public function of English in most colonies... The African writer who uses English, then, is faced at some level with the paradox of representing the experience of oral cultures through literate language and forms” (Iyasera 88).

Achebe argues that instead of rejecting the language that has a universal acceptance, the African

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writer should nativize the language. In other words, English language should be made the vehicle of indigenous experience. He puts his mind into words :

“The real question is not whether Africans could write in English but whether they ought to. Is it right that a man should abandon his mother tongue for someone else's? It looks like a dreadful betrayal and produces a guilty feeling. But for me there is no other choice. I have been given this language and I intend to use it.” (Williams 434).

In fact, the remarkable aspect of African writings in English is that they are very much African in spirit even though the language used to express the experience is foreign. This is a kind of subversion that is often voiced by postcolonial theorists. The colonial language is ‘Africanised’. However, the use of a language that does not belong to the indigenous population underlines the idea that imperialism did erode the place of their pure nativism. There is bound to be mixing of ideas and worldviews and the cultural purity can no longer be maintained. *Arrow of God* exemplifies Achebe's point for although written in a colonial language it carries and conveys the flavour of African culture while undertaking the task of correcting and re-establishing the African identity.

The domination of English language and the European ways is countered by Igbo words and phrases that are scattered in the text in a very casual manner. It also, apparently, helps in accomplishing the objective of Africanising the essence of the novel and the language. The words *obi*, *chi*, *osu*, and *egwugwu* occur frequently and are not difficult to comprehend by the readers and others that occur less frequently, such as *ilo* (the village playground), or *agbala* (woman, or ‘man without title’) are better understood after their translations but in no way do they hinder the flow of the narrative. Moreover, a larger role is played by the proverbs used in the novel to convey traditional wisdom of the people who were even deprived of the status of human beings. The explanations provided by Achebe in English are only a personal rendering, attempting to invoke the spirit of the proverb, while retaining faithfulness to the phraseology and terminology of the native language.

Traditional wisdom is applied to present situations—there is a clash between British culture and the traditional Igbo customs and beliefs.” A snake is never as long as the stick to which we liken its length”, which refers to the stretching of truth and it takes on the sense of exaggerated praise. Another instance of proverb use is when Akuebue, feeling sympathetic with Ezeulu now isolated and accused of complicity with Christians, expressed a desire for unity in their community. “It bothers me”, he said, “because it looks like the saying of our ancestors that when brothers fight to death a stranger inherits their father's estate.” (Achebe, *Arrow* 250). He was perhaps the only one who realized that Ezeulu was not giving up his power and authority deliberately. Instead, he was helpless.

Achebe uses language as a platform to show the cultural combat and the complex situation that is created as a result of colonialism. Along with a sense of inferiority generated within the individual because of racialism there is a need to manifest that black is beautiful. The use of English language, perhaps, facilitates to reach a middle point, for the language had not been the first choice but forced upon, yet it has been tactfully manoeuvred in the hands of creative writers to realize their endeavours. While at the task of screening the socio-cultural life of his people, Achebe does not idealise the pre-colonial past, for he knows that it cannot survive unaltered in a modern world. Instead, he encourages his readers to explore continuities with the past that can coexist with modern society. For Achebe,

reality cannot be static or monolithic in nature; rather, it reflects the idea of continuity. Whether it is religion, politics or socio-cultural structures, all are ever-changing and nothing can be seen in absolute terms but only in context of one another. Moreover, the primordial feature of life is dualism, which is dramatized through the Igbo world—“But it is a dualism based on an acknowledgement of interdependence, between man and gods, individual and community” (Achebe, *Morning* 186)

Through the study of the novel it becomes clear that Africans were in no sense a ‘belated’ race. In fact, the cultural conflict between the Europeans and the natives brings out the rich and pristine uniqueness of the African culture. *Arrow of God* can be interpreted at different levels. At one level Achebe is trying to rectify the misrepresentations regarding Africa and its people at the time of imperialism by presenting the anthropological history of his people, which always existed but was conveniently ignored. At another level, Achebe is trying to drive home the dilemma that a colonized native has to face after the colonial encounter, which brings in elements of ambivalence. Just like Ezeulu, every colonized native looks at the colonizer’s culture as something new and believes that it is the demand of changing times to adapt to new things from which one cannot escape. The tragedy of Ezeulu takes place because he has the desire to change and makes an effort towards it but at the time he is obstinate and rigid in changing his history.

With the end of colonialism, the native achieves political freedom but cultural freedom is not possible. He is faced with many paradoxes and contradictions at the end of the process. It is not possible for the colonized subject to disentangle from the hegemonic control of the colonizers. The native has been transformed into a hybrid and occupies the third space.

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