

The God And People's Power In Chinua Achebe's *Arrow Of God*

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Abstract: Chinua Achebe has made the question of power one of the central concerns of his works. As a novelist, he has devoted considerable attention to the use of powers by leaders. In *Arrow of God*, Achebe focusses on Ezeulu, the Chief Priest and spiritual leader of Umuaro to address the question of who, between Ezeulu and the people of Umuaro, decides the wish of the god. This paper, using textual analysis and application of myth theory argues that Ezeulu's powers are derived from the myth of the founding of Umuaro and arising from this, the people believe that their wish should prevail in Ezeulu's discharge of his functions. The paper contends that the crisis of the New Yam Feast which set the people against Ezeulu is traceable to the refusal of the Chief Priest to let the wish of the people prevail. Umuaro people believe that their Chief Priest has failed to protect them at their trying moment, thus, they abandoned him and Ulu, their god. The paper find that when Ulu later intervenes on the side of the people, it affirms that they have a say in who decides the wish of the god. This intervention leaves no one in doubt that People's power prevails and that "no man however great was greater than his people".

Key Words: Power, People's power, Abuse of power, Concern, Leaders, god, Myth

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I. INTRODUCTION

Arrow of God is Achebe's third novel which he describes in its preface as "the novel which I am most likely to be caught sitting down to read again". It is set in Umuaro, a fictional Igbo community in Nigeria at a time when British Colonial rule and the effects of missionary activities are already entrenched. Umuaro comprised of six villages that come together as a union to face their common enemy. The plot unfolds within this village locale in its rigorous examination of African culture. Achebe (as cited in Killam, 1982) explains his motivation for this work and why he devotes considerable attention to the culture of his people:

I think I'm basically an ancestor worshipper... Not in the same sense as my grandfather would probably do it, you know, pouring palm wine on the floor for the ancestors... With me it takes the form of celebration and I feel a certain compulsion to do this... And in fact the reason (*Arrow of God*) goes back to the past, not as remotely as the first (novel) is that I've learned a lot more about these particular people... my ancestors (p. 59). Achebe puts Ezeulu, the Chief priest of Ulu who is the major character in the novel at the centre of this ancestral worship. Ulu is a God created by the six villages for protection against slave raids and Umuaro elevated the new God as the first among other deities. With the creation of Ulu, its power supersedes that of older village deities and Achebe looks at the complex relationship between the GOD and His Priest when it comes to deciding what shall be the wish of the God: I'm handling a whole lot of ... more complex themes... like the relationship between a god and his priest. My chief character in this novel is a village priest not a Christian priest – a traditional African religion. And I'm interested in this old question of who decides what shall be the wish of the gods... (Killam, p. 60). *Arrow of God* has been subjected to critical analysis by literary and culture scholars since its publication in 1964. For example, Machila (1981) examines the major conflicts in the novel such as the one between the colonial administration and the native authority, the conflicts about the internal politics of Umuaro and the conflict between Ezeulu and Ezeidemili and argues that all these conflicts develop around the person of the Chief Priest. Machila explains in his study that Ezeulu is not only a complex character but as an ambiguous character in the way he relates with Umuaro and the colonial administration. He considers Ezeulu ambiguous because his motives are always impure as they are influenced by numerous often conflicting interests. In addition, Akwanya (2013) regards *Arrow of God* as a harrowing story of traumatic change which makes a traditional society to lose its cultural identity as a result of internal and external pressure. Furthermore, (Aning & Nsiah (2012) critique the novel from the point of view of what they call political myth. According to them, Political myth refers to how African political leaders were able to mobilize the citizens for

independence on the banner of the myth of what united them which is the myth of a common nation state, which they depicted as a paradise on earth. Aning & Nsiah (2012) commented that modern African leaders can learn lessons from Achebe's *Arrow of God* by giving their nations a new cohesive myth during periods of crisis to save the nations from disintegration. Other works have argued that the concern of Achebe in *Arrow of God* is about betrayal of trust and abuse of power by the leaders (Agrawal 2015; Ejesu 2014; Mordaunt 1989; Ojinmah 1991).

All these studies have not fully addressed Achebe's question of who decides the wish of the gods. Therefore, this study aims to explore the nature of the relationship between the leader and the people and the extent of the power of the god in their life. The paper discusses the powerlessness of the leader who disregards the wish of the people, the same people who are the source of the leader's divine power. The objective of the present work, therefore, is to address Achebe's question of whether it is the priest or the people who decides on the wish of the gods. By examining power relation in *Arrow of God*, the question about where power resides could be answered. Writing about *Arrow of God*, Glenn (1985, p. 18) suggests that "the relationship between a god and his priest" and "the old question of who decides what shall be the wish of the gods" are central for discourse.

But before we address Achebe's question, there is a compelling question that needs to be addressed first. How do the African writers portray the relationship between man and god in their works? Osundere (1980) argues that nearly all African novelists portray man as existing in mutual co-operation with other men and in communion with the gods. According to him, this communion between the gods and human is important and indispensable for the realization of what Soyinka describes as 'cosmic totality'. It is a relationship that is compounded by fellow men and supernatural forces which defines African world view. Achebe's first novel, *Things Fall Apart* projects this communion between man and the gods in the way the affairs and conduct of the people of Umuofia are influenced by the wish of the oracles. For example, when Okonkwo violates the week of peace, Ezeani, the priest of the earth goddess chastises him, rejects his kola nut and declares that he would not eat in the house of a man who has no respect for the gods. Ezeani prescribes punitive sacrifice for Okonkwo which Okonkwo earnestly offers in obeisance. He dared not question the decision of the god. In *The Concubine* (1966) Elechi Amadi, another African novelist also projects the domineering influence of the gods in the affairs of man. Osundere (1980, p. 97) asserts that "in no other Nigerian novels have the gods been more dominant than in those of Amadi. Here the gods, uncanny, implacable and ubiquitous, are not only an essence but a presence, woven as it were into every aspect of human relationship". In Amadi's fiction, the intervention of the gods in the affairs of man permeates the whole works and the plot reveals that the ultimate fate of man is determined by the gods. Amadi presents man as being powerless before the gods and he becomes an object of constant manipulation by the divine power of these gods. In *The Concubine* and *The Great Ponds* the power of the gods in the affairs of man is so overwhelming that all human efforts to outwit it are futile. Ola Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not To Blame* presents the relationship between God and man in the same manner as Odewale's efforts to circumvent the prophesy of the god that he would kill his own father and marry his mother proves abortive.

Ulu, the god of the people of Umuaro equally possesses the awesome powers that the gods in Amadi and Rotimi's works possess and its control over the affairs of the people is not in doubt. Ulu's power includes provision of security for the people, His priest keeps the farming calendar and calls the Feast of the New Yam which heralds the harvest season. His protection of security covers religious, political, military and economic life of the people. But unlike the unrivalled power of the Sea goddess in Amadi's work, or Ezeani in *Things Fall Apart*, the power of Ulu is only unrivalled to the extent that His Chief Priest does not abuse it. Ulu becomes vulnerable the moment the people realise it is no longer serving their interest. In addition, the incursion of colonial administration into Umuaro provides another god, the Christian god which colonialism positioned as a sanctuary whenever Ulu fails them. Machila supports this view. According to Machila (1981), "The open attack on Ezeulu's authority, which would have been unthinkable in Okonkwo's Umuofia, becomes possible in Umuaro because under the combined pressure of the new colonial administration, the Christian Church and the new economic forces, the oracles and the priests are beginning to lose their hold on the people" (p. 124).

II. THE MYTH THEORY AND THE MAKING OF THE CHIEF PRIEST AND HIS POWER

In 1946, Ernst Cassirer, a German philosopher came up with a theory about the myth of the state. According to him, the myth of the state was the myth on which a state or a nation was based. Sala (2010) appears to have affirmed Cassirer's view when he posits that every form of social organization requires narratives in order to give it meaning and provide a reason for being. To Jabbi (1980) "myth and ritual complexes within living cultures tend, in their own right, to be intrinsic systems of ideas and general world-views, of modes of perception and sensibility. A more or less cohesive set of propositions about reality and life, about man's place in the world and time, may often be deduced from them..."(p. 132). Few studies have interpreted *Arrow of God* from the point of view of the transformative effect of myth. For example, in their work, *Myth and History in Achebe's Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God*, Geetha and Das (2013) inform us that

Achebe looks at the African history and myth by tracing the transformation of the continent from the old to a new order in the mechanism of adoption to change and that in both novels, the cultures and rituals of the people point to an idea of the past African history and its myth.

In this discourse, we shall examine the central role of myth formation in the sense in which power revolves around it and that the history of Umuaro and its existence rests on its founding myth. The discourse would also show how the power of Ezeulu is derived from the myth and legitimizes his spiritual authority over Umuaro. The novel situates the place of myth in the founding and history of Umuaro and how Ulu came into existence:

In the very distant past, when lizards are still very few and far between, the villages- Umuachala, Umunneora, Umuagu, Umuezeani, Umuogwugwu and Umuisiuzo – lived as different peoples, and each worshipped its own deity. Then the hired soldiers of Abam used to strike in the dead of the night, set fire to the houses and carry men, women and children into slavery. Things were so bad for the six villages that their leaders came together to save themselves. They hired a strong team of medicine- men to install a common deity for them. This deity which the fathers of the six villages made was called Ulu. Half of the medicine was buried at a place which became Nkwo market and the other half thrown into the stream which became Mili Ulu. The six villages then took the name of Umuaro, and the priest of Ulu became their Chief priest. From that day they were never again beaten by an enemy (pp. 14-15).

The foregoing shows that Ulu is a god of necessity installed by the people for protection. As a deity that comes into existence when the six villages resolved to come together, Ulu is a metaphor for the collective strength of Umuaro and its power cannot be devoid of the people. The myth shows that Ezeulu's priesthood over Umuaro is not hereditary, it is the six villages that made him the Chief Priest and that decision presupposes that "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 was his; he would find it food and take care of it. But the day it was slaughtered he would know who the real owner was" (p.3). The import of this metaphor is to remind Ezeulu of his powerlessness and that it is delusional for him to arrogate the collective power of the people to himself. The goat is a metaphor for where power resides- with the people. One expects the Chief Priest to be conscious of this fact and thus exercises his powers mindful of the interests of the people. Umuaro does not expect Ezeulu to repudiate what he and everybody knows. The moment he begins to arrogate Ulu's power to himself, he should expect not only the wrath of the people, but that of Ulu itself. It is ironic that a person who reminds himself of the source of his power in his re-enactment of Umuaro myth at the festival of the pumpkin leaves every year will later turn round to abuse that power. When he does that, he ought to know that the people who empowered him to carry "fire" on his "bare head" and told him to "fear not" will ask questions (pp. 70-71).

This ritualistic enactment of a historical incident is a renewal of Ezeulu's power and a legitimizing exercise meant to show that he is aware of his responsibility and that as a leader who draws his power from the people, he is supposed to put them first and to always act in their best interest. In all this, he derives strength and confidence from the knowledge that the people support him at all times (Balasubramaniya & Raja, 2013) and the event strengthens the clan's solidarity and assurance (Geetha & Das, 2013).

The extent of Ezeulu's power is glimpsed in his soliloquy at the beginning of the novel. This soliloquy is a debate about power, who holds it and the exercise of it. It also foreshadows the subsequent conflicts between Umuaro and its Chief Priest on the proper use of power. This debate also raises the issue of too much powers being concentrated in the hands of few selected individuals and the idea that absolute power corrupts absolutely. Ezeulu is enthralled by the power at his disposal and Achebe projects the likelihood of abuse of power when Ezeulu arrogantly dismisses the limitation of his power and chastises that his power is more than the power of a child over a goat that was said to be his. In his reckoning, "the Chief Priest of Ulu was more than that, must be more than that" Machika, (1981) argues that this thought is delusional because Ezeulu's power is contingent on his people who made him the Chief Priest. Jabbi, (1980 p.137) also comments on Ezeulu's obsession with power and opines that "Ezeulu's meditative habit of intellectual curiosity tends to overreach itself for he is misconstruing a delegated constitutional prescript for an invitation to megalomaniac self-exertion". What this foreshadows, according to Jabbi, is that so early in the story, we begin to sense presages of trouble. Mordaunt (1989) does not mince words about the extent of Ezeulu's power when he posits that his power depends on the supernatural power of Ulu.

III. POWER AND CONFLICTS IN *ARROW OF GOD*.

What drives Ezeulu's relationship with Umuaro is lust for personal power. After his people made him the Chief Priest, he develops insatiable thirst for more powers unmindful of the demands of his high office and the sensibility of Umuaro people. He is not satisfied with being the custodian of the culture and tradition of the people, he wants to have a slice of administrative power. Usongo (2008) opines that Ezeulu's actions are provoked by forces that are greater in their power and influence than humanity. To Usongo, the hero is confronted by a situation with which the organization of his being is unable to cope. Usongo may not be wrong

as Ezeulu himself has repeatedly told Umuaro that the power driving his actions is beyond human comprehension as he is half man half spirit.

Achebe projects Ezeulu as a personality that is equally interested in administrative power. This explains why he asks Oduche, his son to join the colonial school and religion so that he would learn how to cope with the new colonial power. This approximation of his personality agrees with that of Killam (1982, p. 63) who argues that Ezeulu's action is informed by his awareness that it is impossible and foolhardy to resist the white man and it manifests his "concern to know as much as he can about the intention of the white man and the nature of his religion and to turn it to his own account". This action does not, however, go down well with Umuaro because they believe these two powers should not intersect since they do not have anything in common. They are wary of any form of association with colonialism and its features such as Christianity, western education and European economy. The people consider British administration as a threat to their culture and they expect Ezeulu to be in the forefront to fight it. To them, his romance with colonialism is an act of betrayal and abuse of his office. The people have many reasons to be wary of colonial administration. For example, they would not forget in a hurry how Winterbottom, the Colonial District Officer dispossessed them of their land and gave it to their neighbour, Okperi during the Okperi- Umuaro war. But Ezeulu views the matter differently and establishes a kind of romance with the white man in spite of loud protestation from the people and the discontent of his entire household: 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 own 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 (pp.45-46).

This act shows that he does not put the people first and that he acted not in their best interest. His actions depict that the Custodian of the people's tradition and spiritual powers is accommodating foreign culture. This generates a conflict between him and the people with damaging effect on Umuaro. There is an ironic twist in Ezeulu's attempt to come to terms with the reality of the colonial present. The Chief Priest who should be the rallying point of resistance to the colonial authority has also become an instrument for subversion. The imprisonment of the royal python by Oduche exemplifies this further. The python in Umuaro tradition is not just an animal, it is one that is revered and has a lot of significance in terms of the people's cosmic worldview and the mythic environment. In Umuaro, the python is the symbolic totem of Idemili, the god of water. According to Parrinder (1961), the python is considered sacred in many parts of Africa and because of the respect the people accord the animal, they don't kill it and whenever it dies the people give it funeral honour. Oduche's imprisonment of the python should be put in its proper context. Among the people who revere their gods, for anybody to violate the sacredness and sanctity of these gods amounts to an abomination. But Oduche's conversion to Christianity makes him to lose his sense of respect and fear towards the taboos of the clan. Oduche imprisons the python thus committing a taboo. According to Machila (1981), in the eye of the people the Chief Priest and not Oduche becomes the man who brings the proverbial ant-infested faggots into the hut. Oduche's action throws the whole community into an uproar and it sets Ezeulu and Ezidimili against each other. The action provides an opportunity for Umuaro to rally round their god. The crisis this episode generates shows the extent the people can go to protect the gods. Because of the people's faith in the inviolability of their gods, their initial reaction when they heard of the abomination is unbelief. Still cloaked in unbelief, the people chorus that "what that man Ezeulu will bring to Umuaro is pregnant and nursing a baby at the same time" (P.52).

Killam (1982) draws attention to the symbolism in Oduche's action. To him, the imprisoned python struggling for survival represents the struggle of the old gods against the new religion. While Killam's submission is true, it is also true that Ezeulu is vicariously guilty for this crisis. Because of his vicarious culpability one expects him to empathise with Ezidimili, the custodian of the python. But Ezeulu, probably being goaded by the power he wields, rather than seek the understanding of Ezidimili, insults and antagonizes him. When the latter rightly sends an emissary to him to find out what he would do about the abomination that has been committed in his house, he arrogantly asked Idemili "to go and eat shit" (AOG P. 54). It is only a feeling of self-importance and abuse of power that can explain this reckless expression of impunity. The conflict is indeed building up.

The role played by the Chief Priest in the land dispute between Umuaro and Okperi also shows how Ezeulu's power is becoming a source of conflict in Umuaro. Umuaro and Okperi are entangled in a land dispute and when Ezeulu addressed the assembly where Umuaro's claim to the ownership of the land is being discussed, he sounded as somebody whose view should not be controverted because he thinks his voice is the voice of the god. He told the people of Umuaro that Ulu would not fight an unjust war because his father had told him the land does not belong to Umuaro. From his submission, it appears the Chief Priest is interchanging two distinct entities, his person, and Ulu the god. For a person who constantly claims that "One half of him was man and the other half mmo – the half that was painted over with white chalk at important religious moments. And half of the things he ever did were done by this spirit side". it would not be misplaced if the people challenge his overriding authority in the land dispute (AOG P. 192). The question this raises, according to Machila (1981) is

whether Ulu not being ready to fight a war of blame is based on the pronouncement of the oracle or on what his father had told him. Which half of him is speaking? Ojinmah (1991) appears to have answered this question when he submits that Achebe's acknowledgement that half of the things Ezeulu ever did were done by his human side creates interpretative ambiguity. Carroll has also argued that Ezeulu has a tendency to ascribe his wishes to the god (Carroll, 1980). One is not surprised that Nwaka contradicts him.

When Nwaka contradicts him and tells the assembly that "My father told me a different story", his reasoning is logical: Wisdom is like a goatskin bag; every man carries his own. Knowledge of the land is also like that. Ezeulu has told us what his father told him about the olden days. 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. If Ezeulu had spoken about the great deity of Umuaro which he carries and which his fathers carried before him I would have paid attention to his voice. But he speaks about events which are older than Umuaro itself. I shall not be afraid to say that neither Ezeulu nor any other in this village can tell us about these events (p. 16).

The land dispute between Umuaro and Okperi exposes the depth of the internal crisis in Umuaro itself and we see the Chief Priest locked in conflict with a sizeable number of the people. We also see in this conflict a power tussle between Ezeulu and Ezidimili since it is widely known throughout Umuaro that Ogbuefi Nwaka is the alter ego of the priest of Idemili. Many therefore see the altercation between Ezeulu and Nwaka at the village assembly as the continuation of the rivalry between Ezeulu and Ezidimili.

On the other hand, Nwaka's opposition can be explained on the Igbo man abhorrence of absolute power which Ezeulu tends to exhibit. The Igbo man believes in independence of every man and his right to speak on matters that concerns him. He does not believe in the monarchical system of Kingship and would not allow Ezeulu to become one. To Nwaka, "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. But I have been watching this Ezeulu for many years. He is a man of ambition; he wants to be King, Priest, diviner, all. His father, they said, was like that too. But Umuaro showed him that Igbo people knew no Kings. The time has come to tell his son also (pp. 27-28). Achebe sustains Nwaka's accusation that Ezeulu is ambitious and wants to arrogate more powers to himself. He told Bernth Lindfors: "What (Nwaka) was saying in reality was that Ezeulu was getting too powerful...The word 'King' was used here to describe someone who was trying to become too powerful. And this runs against the Ibo belief in the complete integration of life, against their concept of an individual versus society" (Cited in Ojinmah, 1991, p. 29). Achebe's assertion relates to the republican nature of the Igbo traditional society, a society that is always on the watch for human instinct to abuse power.

Winterbottom eventually intervenes in the land dispute. He set up an enquiry to determine the ownership of the land in question and Ezeulu's testimony baffles Umuaro. He denounces their claim and testifies that the land belongs to Okperi. More than ever before, Umuaro feels betrayed and this aggravates the tension in the community and reduces the people's trust in their Chief Priest. Ezeulu becomes a marked man and Umuaro people are only waiting patiently for the opportunity to pay him back. The clash between Ezeulu and the colonial administration provides the people with that opportunity as the majority of the people are indifferent to his plight. This clash leads to Ezeulu's imprisonment by Winterbottom when he rejects the offer of a warrant chief and according to Machila (1981, p. 126) "Ezeulu's refusal to come running for a chieftainship from Winterbottom precipitates the crisis that culminates in Umuaro people's desertion of their god Ulu for the god of the Christians". The import of Machila's claim is that the crisis serves as an opportunity for the people to express their power. We should look at how this happens.

At the time Ezeulu is dispensing power over Umuaro as the Chief Priest, there is another source of power which is undoubtedly greater than his own. The Colonial authority has already taken root in the locality and is dispensing the ultimate authority from "The Government Hill". At the Government Hill, the colonialist's representative, Captain Winterbottom, holds court. The "Union Jack" which flies in front of Winterbottom's bungalow symbolizes that he is the Queen's representative in the District. So, nobody, including Ezeulu, needs be reminded that the white man wields the ultimate power. Ezeulu, like every other native, should know that a white man who takes the salute on every Empire Day during the march past of all the school children in the district possesses abundant power. He should know that a man who presides over the Magistrate Court that sentences offending natives to prison has political and judicial powers that surpass that of the cultural power of a village priest. But on the contrary, Ezeulu still challenges the authority of Winterbottom and defies his powers. He rejects the white man's offer of a Warrant Chief and he is imprisoned for his recalcitrance. The rejection is both understandable and troubling. It is understandable because he fails to reconcile with the awesome powers of the white man. It is troubling because he stubbornly forgets, and so soon too, that the white man who has the powers to stop the war between his community and Okperi, also has decisive powers over all of them. It is more troubling because his long imprisonment prevents him from performing his cultural and traditional duties to his people which remotely contributes to his fall from power. In his moments of, perhaps, power drunkenness and a desire to protect the god of his people, Ezeulu sees the white man as his competitor and rival and not his superior. Because he is used to dispensing traditional powers unchallenged, he deludes himself by thinking that

his powers are inviolable and that whatever force that crosses his path would earn his wrath. For example, when Wright, the white road builder whips Obika for coming late for public works, Ezeulu views the white man as a force that has crossed his path and boasts that "If I was sure of my son do you think I would sit here now talking to you while a man who pokes his finger into my eyes goes home to his bed? If I did nothing else I would pronounce a few words on him and he would know the powers in my mouth" (p. 98-99). Jabbi (1980, pp.140-141) argues that Ezeulu's posture is not misplaced because "he sees the European presence with which they are now confronted in the narrative as merely another such force, the 'latest' obstacle or 'evil' in their collective march of history... that he perceives this new confrontation with the white man in accordance with the underlying philosophy and historic destiny of the Ulu priesthood".

The collision between Ezeulu and the white man heightens when Ezeulu rebuffs Winterbottom's invitation to Okperi. Ezeulu rejects this invitation and this leads to a serious altercation between him and Winterbottom. In his naivety, Ezeulu confidently informs his household that his "good friend" will not send "a mission of death" to him. This feeling of self-importance does not make him realize that what is unfolding before his eyes could be the first step to his ruination and that of the god, Ulu that he has unwittingly compromised with the Oduche story. There is a nagging irony in the Chief Priest, the symbol of his people's religion and traditions, openly declaring and celebrating friendship with an imperialist who has come to displace Ezeulu's god and all it stands for and who does not make any pretext about it. One is at a loss for the basis of such friendship. When Ezeulu told the court messenger that "You must first return, however, and tell your white man that Ezeulu does not leave his hut" (p.139) though he is speaking the truth of his priesthood, he forgets that the white man is ignorant about African custom. Akuebe and Edogo's palliative measures to mitigate the profundity of Ezeulu's audacity do not stop Winterbottom from clamping Ezeulu into prison. His imprisonment snowballs into serious conflagration in Umuaro.

IV. WHO DECIDES WHAT SHALL BE THE WISH OF THE GODS? PORTRAYAL OF PEOPLE'S POWER.

The popular refrain that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely finds definitive expression in the conduct of Ezeulu especially with the way he visualizes and uses power. This raises two questions. The first is about the extent to which the powers he wields are discretionary. The second is who, between him and the people, decides what shall be the wish of the gods? Carroll appears to have taken side with the people in his analyses of Ezeulu's ceremonial appearances when he submits that in these appearances, he is half man and half spirit and that "in the world of man he is very powerful, but in the world of spirits he is a servant" (1980 p. 91). Ezeulu's absolute perception of his power emanates from his inability to distinguish between Ezeulu, the man and Eze-Ulu, the Chief Priest. He often mixes and confuses the two and thus has a tendency to ascribe his wishes to the deity. An instance of this is when Ulu admonishes his priest, Ezeulu, for arrogating the powers of the god to himself: "Ta! Nwanu!" Barked Ulu in his ear, as a spirit would in the ear of an impertinent human child. "Who told you that this was your own fight?"... "I say who told you this was your own fight to arrange the way it suits you?" ... Beware you do not come between me and my victim or you may receive blows not meant for you" (pp. 191-192). But Ojinmah (1991) contends that Ezeulu's two roles as the intermediary for the people and servant of the god need not conflict if Ezeulu adequately recognizes his responsibility and the ultimate source of his power which is the people. In his use of power, Ezeulu conveniently forgets the source of his power and dares the source. Ezeulu's popular refrain "that what does the clan know, who tells the clan what it says", Akwanya (2013) has observed, is an affirmation of absolute power which exhausts Umuaro quite fatally.

There is no doubt that Ezeulu wields absolute power over his people and according to Carroll (1980) by determining when the people plant and harvest their crops, Ezeulu controls the lives of his people. It is like the power of life and death. But in *Arrow of God*, the story of Ulu and the power of its Chief Priest is accepted by all the people of Umuaro only to the extent that the power is not abused. The people see Ulu as their saviour and protector and accord its Priest the deserved reverence and recognition. In spite of the rivalry among Ezidimili, Nwaka and Ezeulu, neither Nzidimili nor Nwaka, his alter ego, questions the pre-eminence of Ulu and its authority over them- as long as its priest conforms to the dictates of the god. Whenever the Priest abuses his power, the people make him realize that power resides with them.

No other incident reflects that power resides with the people than the initial apprehension and fear of Ezeulu when he was made the Chief Priest. When the six villages resolved to create the Ulu deity and asked Ezeulu to carry it on their behalf, he expressed unwillingness to do so and he does not mince his words on why he would not:

"Who am I to carry this fire on my bare head? A man who knows that his anus is small does not swallow an udala seed."

They said to me:

"Fear not. The man who sends a child to catch a shrew will also give him water to wash his hand."

I said: "So be it." (p. 71)

The message in this conversation needs explanation. The "man" in the first narrative is Ezeulu and the allusion to "a small anus" is an imagery for his lack of power. The Udala seed represents the deity and Ezeulu realizes that swallowing it would create problem for him. In this metaphor, we see Ezeulu's realistic appraisal of himself. But the people allayed his fear. The "man" in the people's response refers to the community, and the Chief priest is the child they send on an errand to catch the shrew (the Deity). They assured him that they would give him support (water) in the course of carrying out the obviously difficult task. Achebe uses these metaphorical proverbs to show that power resides with the people. Ezeulu's acceptance to carry the deity is due to the assurance and support from the people. If we link this episode to the musing of Ezeulu at the beginning of the novel where he ponders on his power and says that "His power was no more than the power of a child over a goat that was said to be his" it is evident that he speaks the truth (p. 3).

We see at the beginning of the novel that Ezeulu discharges his power as the watchman over the moon very well and this creates harmony between him and Umuaro. He also does not fail the people during the festival of the pumpkin leaves where he acts as the scapegoat for the people's sins and transgressions. But his refusal to call the New Yam Feast, his most divine responsibility to Umuaro makes the people show him that power resides with them. According to Achebe, the Feast marks the end of the old year and beginning of the new. Harvesting of big farms is only allowed after the festival has been performed. The festival reminds the six villages of their coming together in ancient times and affords them an opportunity to show their continuing debt to Ulu who saved them from the warriors of Abam. It is also the day for all the minor deities in the community who do not have any day dedicated for their worship and special feasts. It is the one public appearance the smaller gods are allowed in the year. The feast of the new yam brings god and men together in one crowd. Achebe describes the rare communion of men and god during this feast as "the only assembly in Umuaro in which a man might look to his right and find his neighbour and look to his left and see a god standing there" (p. 202). This communion of men and god is valued by the people and thus they look earnestly forward to the festival. Umuaro people expect Ezeulu to perform this responsibility religiously never contemplating for once that a time will come when he would fail to discharge them. But contrary to the expectation of the people, the Chief Priest fails to call the biggest feast of the year and the whole community plunges into crisis.

We have argued earlier that what precipitates the major crisis in *Arrow of God* is the decision of Winterbottom to appoint Ezeulu a paramount chief and his rejection of the offer. However, one is also compelled to observe that the tragic consequences that follow this episode is not caused by Winterbottom, but rather due to the resolve of Ezeulu to avenge his imprisonment on his people. It is true that Ezeulu's incarceration in Okperi prevents him from performing the ritual sighting of the moon since the number of the moons the Chief priest declared sighted determines the time of the New Yam Feast, but it is equally true that the people acknowledge this and appeals to him to find a way out of the predicament. Unfortunately, Ezeulu's fixation with a revenge action against Umuaro for not protesting his imprisonment makes him postpone the feast.

The implication of postponing the feast is not lost on the people. They see hunger and starvation in sight. If they do not reach a compromise with their Chief Priest, it means threat of death since they cannot harvest their yam, their major source of livelihood. To find a solution to this crisis, ten men of high title visit the Chief priest to explore how the god can be appeased. At this meeting, Ezeulu tells them that Ulu's wish is sacrosanct. Though they appreciate his reasons for not calling the feast, they still plead for a compromise. One of them, Nnanyelugo, speaks for the others:

I think that Ezeulu has spoken well. Everything he has said entered my ears. We all know the custom and no one can say that Ezeulu has offended against it. But the harvest is ripe in the soil and must be gathered now or it will be eaten by the sun and the weevils. At the same time Ezeulu has just told us that he still has three sacred yams to eat from last year. What then do we do? ... Although I am not the priest of Ulu I can say that the deity does not want Umuaro to perish. We call him the savior. Therefore you must find a way out, Ezeulu. If I could I would go now and eat the remaining yams. But I am not the priest of Ulu. It is for you, Ezeulu, to save our harvest (AoG. P. 207).

Asking Ezeulu to save their harvest is asking him to save their lives. The harvest is a metaphor for their lives. It ought to be clear to Ezeulu that the whole Umuaro have expressed their wish which he should consider as a leader they have sent on an errand. But he rejects their plea. The rejection portrays him as a leader who feels power resides with him. The people do not think so. The response of Ogbuefi Udeozo serves to remind Ezeulu the source of his power. He tells Ezeulu:

I want you to look round this room and tell me what you see. Do you think there is another Umuaro outside this hut now?

'No, you are Umuaro,' said Ezeulu.

'Yes, we are Umuaro. Therefore listen to what I am going to say. Umuaro is now asking you to go and eat those remaining yams today and name the day of the next harvest. Do you hear me well? I said go and eat

those yams today, not tomorrow; and if Ulu says we have committed an abomination let it be on the head of the ten of us here. You will be free because we have set you to it, and the person who sends a child to catch a shrew should also find him water to wash the odour from his hand. We shall find you the water. Umuaro, have I spoken well.

‘You have said everything. We shall take the punishment.’ (p. 208).

Udeozo’s order that “Umuaro is now asking you to go and eat those remaining yams” points to where power resides. Unfortunately, Ezeulu remains defiant when he tells Umuaro that “you cannot say: do what is not done and we shall take the blame. I am the Chief Priest of Ulu and what I have told you is his will not mine.” But nobody is sure that what he has said is the will of Ulu against the backdrop that he hints at his intention to hit Umuaro at its most vulnerable point earlier in the novel. This shows that Ezeulu, the man, is beginning to appear from behind the priest as Carrol (1980) and Ojinmah (1991) posit. It is not impossible that he is hiding behind the priest to wreck vengeance on his people. He is beginning to see himself as the arrow in the hand of the god. This renders what he tells the delegation questionable. He fails to realise that he cannot hold tenaciously to his desire for vengeance where the collective interest of the people is involved, the same people who are the owner of the powers he flaunts. The owner of Ulu has asked His Chief Priest to appease Ulu in their own way with expressed readiness to absolve him of any repercussions and he still defiantly insists “it is not my will to do so”. His insistence, according to Onyibor (2016) results in the inevitable consequences of a situation where those who are put in a position of authority forget the derivative source of their power and cling to their individual inclination. By this defiance, Onyibor argues further that Ezeulu has failed to dance to the music prevalent in his time which he is an advocate of. Ejesu (2014) also finds his defiance puzzling as it contradicts the wisdom embodied in his philosophy that one must dance the dance prevalent in one’s time.

Ejesu (2014) casts Ezeulu as a promethean figure. A promethean figure according to Ejesu has conscious intellect and foresight. He argues that Ezeulu’s promethean aptitude explains his flexibility in allowing his son to learn the white man’s culture and religion. He therefore wonders why he has not applied the same flexibility in the handling of this delicate matter in the face of the peculiar realities of the time. According to Onyibor (2016), the Umuaro people expect Ezeulu to negotiate with them, to listen to their opinions and to change with the times. They expect him to be flexible and eat the remaining yams so that they can have their feast. His rigid stance puts him in serious conflict with the people and the people are left with no choice except to show him the limitations of his powers. Ugwuanyi, Chukwu and Eze (2016) also comment on this power tussle by arguing that while Umuaro perceives Ulu as their possession and expected to do their bidding or be discarded, Ezeulu sees the people as subjects of Ulu, and himself accountable, first to Ulu, and then the people.

This paper proposes that it is in the final resolution of this matter that Achebe proffers what appears an answer to where power resides. He does this through the portrayal of the supremacy of the powers of the people over that of an individual. He first hints at this through a dream Ezeulu had in Okperi. In this dream, the Umuaro people rebelled against his grandfather. The people resisted his grandfather’s authority and did not want him to speak to them. They vowed not to rely on him to tell them the season of the year, after all everyman can see the moon in his own compound. They questioned the relevance of Ulu in the colonial era, which, though saved their fathers from the Abam warriors but could not save them from the white man. “Let us drive him away as our neighbours of Aninta drove out and burnt Ogba when he left what he was called to do and did other things, when he turned round to kill the people of Aninta instead of their enemies” (p. 159). In the dream, the people violently seized the Chief Priest who has now changed to Ezeulu and they spat on him and pushed him from one group to another. But Ezeulu to his peril does not see what this dream foreshadows, unfortunately so when Achebe informs us that what Ezeulu has seen is not a dream but a vision. It is clear that this dream foreshadows what awaits him if he is not cautious in his dealing with Umuaro. Dutta (2010) points out the implication of the dream. According to him, “The dream Ezeulu has on his first night at Okperi vividly prophesies the very way of his fall- that he would be stripped of power and become “the priest of a dead god” (p. 70). Instead of sensing danger, Ezeulu dares the apparently more fortified and determined Umuaro people that he would see who would drive the other away. Meanwhile, the village church which has been watching this development with keen interest wades into the crisis.

Goodcountry, the Catechist of St Mark’s C. M. S. Church, Umuaro see the mounting crisis in the community as an opportunity sent by God. The crisis over the New Yam Feast provides his church an opportunity for fruitful intervention. He regards the feast as the attempt of the misguided heathen to express gratitude to God the giver of all good things. The crisis to him is God’s hour to save Umuaro from their error which is threatening to ruin them. It provides an opportunity for him to tell the community that the Christian god would provide sanctuary for them and save them from the evils of Ulu. Goodcountry has always preached that his own god is superior to Ulu and whoever comes to Christ is protected from the malevolence of the native god. This is in consonant with the objective of Christianity as an instrument of colonialism. The colonialist presented the religion as unassailable with the power to assuage all the fear and apprehension of the native. Marandi and Shadpour (2011) in their discourse of Christianity as an ideological instrument in *Arrow of God*

argue that the Bible had shed a new light on the lives of the natives which enable them to interpret every event of their lives through the Bible. The missionaries, according to them, portrayed the values and rituals of the natives as degenerate and evil and tried to inject their own values instead. Therefore, in the name of Christ, Goodcountry informed Umuaro that if they make their offering to God, they could harvest their crops without fear of any repercussion from Ulu. The news soon spread throughout the six villages of Umuaro that anyone who does not want to wait and see all his crops ruined can take his offering to the god of the Christians who would in turn give him power of protection from the anger of Ulu. With the involvement of Christianity in the crisis, Achebe seems to pass a message to Ezeulu that his god does not possess monopoly of power, that his insistence to singlehandedly decide the wish of the god has turned out to be counterproductive since it pushes the people to embrace another god.

The defiance of Ezeulu made the people to reappraise their values and their relationship with Ulu. The quest for survival, compel them to have a second look at their values and what Christianity now offers. They find meaning in the Christian value at this critical point and they embrace it. One agrees with Glenn (1985) that the villagers are tolerant but skeptical, democratic, challenging the authority and open to change. Their value is not to have fixed values. Ezeulu recognizes erosion of his power in this development and on confirming its veracity from Oduche, the son he has sent to the church to be his eyes and ears there, he dismissed him as the lizard that ruins his father's funeral for not alerting him of the impending doom. There is an irony in this development in that Ezeulu's quest to have a share in the white man's administrative power has turned round to haunt him. The action of the people in embracing the Christian god demonstrates that they have started gravitating to a more potent source of power due to the rigidity of their Chief Priest. We also see that Ezeulu's crave to corner the future by putting one foot in the world of the white man through Oduche fails to save him.

The tragedy that befalls the Chief Priest in the death of Obika, his remarkable son and the village pride shatters his power and this is significant in the sense that the people see it as a punitive arrow of god. Achebe informs us that Obika's death "shook Umuaro to the roots" and to Ezidimili, Ezeulu has dared both the god and the community and the death should teach the Chief Priest how far he could dare and dismiss the people who made him what he is next time.

In Obika's death, Ezeulu realizes his powerlessness and wonders why Ulu has hit him with such an arrow:

But why, he asked himself again and again, why had Ulu chosen to deal thus with him, to strike him down and then cover him with mud? What was his Offence? Had he not defined the god's will and obeyed it? ... Whoever sent his son up on the palm to gather nuts and then took an axe and felled the tree? But today such a thing had happened before the eyes of all. What could it point to but the collapse and ruin of all things? (p. 229)

Critics such as Ojinmah (1991) try to explain the mystery surrounding Obika's death. They see the death as another sacrifice to Ulu. Ojinmah argues that as in its creation:

"the deity, requires a propitiatory sacrifice that is commensurate with the "task" the deity has to perform, of saving the clan. To "cushion" its demise, as in its creation, in accordance with Ibo world-view, requires appropriate sacrifice. Obika's death fulfils this function, but more than this, it represents the most proportional resolution that conclusively incorporates Ezeulu without leaving any loose ends.

Achebe, in what one may call a post-mortem verdict on the tragic fall of Ezeulu, stresses the likelihood of Ezeulu's assailant standing over him for a little while and finally stepping on him as on an insect and crushing him under the heel in the dust. Metaphorically, his assailant indeed stood over him during their supplication to him to call the feast of the New Yam. They crushed him as one crushes an insect when he fails to heed their plea. If for no other reason, to prove that power resides with them and that no man however great is greater than the people. In the eyes of Umuaro, a recalcitrant Priest is not more than a powerless insect!

So in the end only Umuaro and its leaders saw the final outcome. To them the issue was simple. Their god had taken sides with them against his headstrong and ambitious priest and thus upheld the wisdom of their ancestors – that no man however great was greater than the people; that no one ever won judgment against his clan (p. 230).

There is the need to relate the final resolution of the crisis to the objective of this study. With the series of calamity that befall Ezeulu, it seems Achebe's question of who decides the wish of the gods has been answered in favour of the people. Ulu, it appears, has taken side with the people to prove its fidelity to those who created it in the first place. But we should quickly point out that the people had not always questioned the power of the god over their affairs. The revolt starts when the people realized that "Ezeulu's presumption makes him believe that he is in some kind of holy alliance with Ulu, and with this conviction he weaves a pattern of doom for Umuaro and calls it nothing but divine justice" (Machila, 1981 p.128). The people would have nothing of such.

V. CONCLUSION

This paper attempts to answer Achebe's question about who decides the wish of the god with the portrayal of People's power in *Arrow of God*. The study has revealed the supremacy of the people's power over that of an individual to prove that in deciding the wish of the god the people matters. When Ezeulu's actions and defiance begin to show that the people's wish and aspirations no longer matter to him, the people let him know that power resides with them and are they ones who have metaphorically sent him on the palm to gather nuts. Having found that what he is doing on top of the palm tree is ministering to his own wish, they took an axe and fell the tree. When the tree fell with the death of Obika and the defection of the people to Christianity, Ezeulu, is confronted with the emptiness of his powers. In the end, it is the power of the people that prevailed. Ezeulu's fall from grace to a demented priest confirms Achebe's philosophical refrain "that no man however great is greater than his people; that no one ever won judgment against his clan". This refrain, according to Ojinmah (1991) "evokes and underlines the derivative basis of power which its holders are wont to forget". It also answers the question of who decides the wish of the god.

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