

**Exploitation of the Igbo Priest and People in *Arrow of God***

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**Abstract:**

The very purpose of the writings of Chinua Achebe is to rediscover the rich African cultural past. The European colonial administration, religion and education have exploited the African culture, people, and environment during colonial period. Later on they continued same things through imperialism. Chinua Achebe's novel *Arrow of God* is desperate dramatization of African cultural, religious and traditional past in general and of Nigerian Igbo community in particular. This research paper is an attempt to analyze exploitation of Igbo people, religion, culture, and Igbo land by the colonizers through various means in *Arrow of God*.

**Keywords:** dehumanization, exploitation, colonial rule, Warrant Chief, British administration, etc

**Introduction:**

Achebe's third novel *Arrow of God* is deeply rooted in Igbo tradition and administration. The rich cultural past of Africans can be studied in the first novel *Things Fall Apart*. The fictional village Umuofia has its titled men, elders, *egwugwu* and secret society to maintain law and order in the clan. It can be observed that the power and governance is decentralized among the above people and representatives of deities. The same kind of Igbo traditions and administration can be observed in the fictional village Umuaro, an amalgamation of six villages in *Arrow of God*. Achebe has created a strong religious leader, Ezeulu, the priest of common deity, *Ulu*. He regulates the wish of the god and carries complaints and problems of his people from six villages to the common god, *Ulu*. In this way, he manages his community of six villages run smooth without any conflict. As the novel opens one can notice that the White men are already settled in the village Umuaro. Captain T. K. Winterbottom is the District Officer. He has his working station at Okperi, which is called Government Hill; from there he controls the administration. There are five Europeans at Okperi, Captain Winterbottom, the District Officer, Mr. Clark the Assistant District Officer, Robert the Assistant Superintendent of Police, Mr. Wade the in charge of the Prison and Mr. Wright the Supervisor in Public Works Department.

The narrator describes the unfriendly atmosphere of Africa through Captain Winterbottom's perspective. It is necessary to cite the full description of African climate to understand its implications.

Captain T. K. Winterbottom stood at the veranda of his bungalow on Government Hill to watch the riot of the year's first rain. For the past month or two the heat had been building up to an unbearable pitch. The grass had long been burnout, and the leaves of the more hardy trees had taken on the red and brown earth color of the country. There was only two hours' respite in the morning before the country turned into a furnace and perspiration came down in little steams from the head and neck. The most exasperating was the little stream that always coursed down behind the ear like a fly, walking. There was another moment of temporary relief at sundown when a cool wind blew. But this treacherous beguiling wind was the great danger of Africa. The unwary European who bared himself to it received the death-kiss. (AOG, 29)

This is the most dehumanizing description of African climate by the European. The African climate is always a kind of character in the imaginations of the White people. They think it as unfriendly, treacherous, and beguiling. Not only the European colonizers but travelers, traders, and even literary artists have described it in an exploitative manner and have created stereotypes of it.

Mr. Clark is about to go to visit Captain Winterbottom but to pass the time he reads the book, *the Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger*, by George Allen. Mr. Clark finds the last few paragraphs are quite stirring in the Chapter, THE CALL.'

For those seeking but a comfortable living and a quiet occupation Nigeria is closed and will be close until the earth has lost some of its deadly fertility and until the people live under something like sanitary conditions. But for those in search of a strenuous life, for these who can deal with men as others deal with material, who can grasp great situations, coax events, shape destinies and ride on the crest of the wave of time Nigeria is holding out her hands- (33)

This is the Nigeria and its climate in the colonial text. One can easily come across the notions like devaluation, misrepresentation and stereotyping of Nigeria as a country and its climate. Achebe's primary aim is to expose the European imagination about the Africa and ridicule the idea of Africa under the conditions for living. With the above mentioned exploitation of African character, Achebe also depicts political abuse of Africans. The British Lieutenant Governor finds that it is difficult to govern and maintain law and order in the vast territory of Africa. Therefore, he decides to give some rights to the natives to look after local political affairs. With this purpose, the British Administration in Africa introduces native

institutional governance in Nigeria which is called *Indirect Rule*. In the indirect rule system, a local political leader is to be selected and appointed as *Warrant Chief* at local area of village level to maintain and execute White men's orders and decisions. Captain Winterbottom receives the memorandum from Lieutenant Governor. He has orders to find out and select persons who are capable to the appointment as *Warrant Chiefs* in the Indirect Rule system. At first Captain Winterbottom hesitates to implement the orders because he has a worst experience of a *Warrant Chief*, James Ikedi. But he has to find and select such a person. Then he reminds that there is a man, Ezeulu who has witnessed against his own people in a land dispute, and he has the potential to be a *Warrant Chief*. Therefore, Captain assigns his messenger to call Ezeulu at Okperi to have discussion on the issue. At first Ezeulu refuses the call and does not go with the messengers. The furious Winterbottom commands his messenger to arrest Ezeulu and fetch him to Government Hill. Meanwhile Ezeulu comes himself with his son, Obika to meet Winterbottom. As he arrives at Okperi, Captain Winterbottom falls seriously ill and cannot meet Ezeulu. Mr. Clark keeps Ezeulu in guardroom and asks to wait for instructions from Winterbottom. Mr. Clark avoids meeting Ezeulu and visits Winterbottom, who orders to put the proposal of *Warrant Chief* before Ezeulu. But Ezeulu does not accept the proposal and Mr. Clark gets furious. He locks Ezeulu for four days. Then he consults captain Winterbottom who instructs Clark, "Leave him inside until he learns to co-operate with the Administration" (177).

During his stay at Okperi Ezeulu could not see the new moon and in this way, he misses two new moons. Consequently, the agricultural calendar is disturbed. The administration keeps Ezeulu in guardroom for thirty-two days but the detention cannot change Ezeulu's mind to accept the offer of warrant chief. Then Mr. Clark realizes that it is improper to lock the priest without any guilt and that again mere for he does not accept the government offer and making the government fool. This is how Ezeulu is kept away from his home, people, God, *Ulu* for thirty two days without any proper reason. The suffering of Ezeulu at Okperi is very important from the view point of the critic Emmanuel Ngara. He calls it a trick of the colonizers to make one obey them. He clears the trick, "to Winterbottom the African is a savage 'native' with whom there should be no compromise. He simply must submit to British rule or face the might of the British Empire" (67). The same trick can be observed that Ezeulu is locked for more than a month for either he should accept the proposal or face the might of the administration. It is the harassment of a religious priest who just wants to be chief of his deity and of nobody else. Such politics can be seen in *Arrow of God*. The British colonial administration uses many means to keep the native under control. It also uses different tricks to frighten the native. One cannot rebel against the administration and for this it creates fearful and threatening atmosphere. Ezeulu's detention is a part of such policy to terrorize the native leader and make him to obey the rule and not to rebel against it.

The economic exploitation is also inevitable in colonial rule and *Arrow of God* is no exception to it. The British administration builds a new road between Umuaro and Okperi,

and it has to be built before the rainy season. The Supervisor in Public Work Department, Mr. Wright supervises the construction of road. He has the responsibility to complete the road within the time, but he finds it impossible to complete it with the help of very low number of workers. He asks Captain to hire more workers immediately. But Captain informs Mr. Wright that there is no more money in the government treasury to hire extra labour. Mr. Wright has an idea to reduce the daily wages of the labourers from three pence to two pence. But he realizes that reducing wages will not increase labourers. Hence, he decides to employ unpaid labours and for this he requests the elders of Umuaro to arrange such labour. The leaders form two groups of young men to work on White man's road. On the day of festival, Obika and his friend Ofoedu drink too much palm wine in the night. Therefore, they reach late at work. Then something happens between Obika and Mr. Wright and Wright whips Obika very severely when someone tries to defend, Mr. Wright screams, "shut up, you black monkeys, and get down to work" (AOG, 83). After the whipping the workers declare that they will not work more. But someone reveals the implications of such step; that the White man would take all their leaders into prison at Okperi. The villager, Moses mentions that he has travelled wide and distant countries and experienced that there is no escape from White man's power. He adds,

-The white man, the new religion, the soldiers, the new road-they are all part of the same thing. The white man has gun, a matchet, and a bow and carries fire in his mouth. He does not fight with one weapon alone. (85)

Then the two groups of workers decide to meet the White man and ask him that other workers are being paid for the same work and why they are not? Or if their work is different. Though they know the White man is very cunning, they go to meet him. Achebe portrays a very pathetic description of the bullying of workers specially whipping to Obika. Achebe shows it is very hard to escape from White man's weapons because he knows how and when to use it. Moreover, whichever weapon he uses, suffering of the native is inevitable.

It has been observed that the Christian missionary exploits the sensibility of the natives at cultural level too. The harvesting of New Yam begins in Umuaro with the *New Yam Festival* and it is Ezeulu's religious right and duty to declare it. When there is one Yam is left out of the thirteen sacred Yams, he selects thirteen sacred yams and eats one yam on each new moon, but he could not eat two yams while he was in the guardroom at Okperi. Consequently, the new *Yam Fest* is delayed by two new moons. The people of Umuaro do not have yams to eat. They cannot harvest Yams before offering it to their deity, *Ulu*. *Ulu* will punish them if they do so before offering it. Umuaro is in confusion about the Feast and the crisis mount in Umuaro. John Goodcountry sees the mounting crisis as an opportunity to misguide the common people in the name of the God and security. He appeals to the starving people that if they want to reap their Yams, they should offer Yam to the Christian God, who will save them from the wrath of *Ulu*, and they can harvest the crop in the name of the God. Goodcountry again appeals them that they can offer not only one Yam but as many as they

wish, and not only yams but money or anything. Goodcountry's trick works and the villagers offer money and other agricultural products to the Christian God, abandoning their own tribal god, *Ulu*. Goodcountry and Moses Unachukuwu plan to make the people to bring more than one yam. So they urge the villagers with an analogy, "If Ulu who is a false god can eat one yam the living God who own the whole world should be entitled to eat more than one" (215-16).

Mr. Goodcountry is a greedy man who uses many tricks to deceive the people and misuses Christianity for his own purpose. In this way the harvest is reaped in the name of Christian God and an age long culture is molested by Goodcountry. The British Administration, Christianity and their officers and clergymen all are participant in the exploitative process during and sometimes after the colonial rule. Prof. S. A. Khayyoom finds, "The colonial system of administration, its social and political institutions and its new religion, together constitute formidable cohesive forces" (61). Moses Unachukuwu has already pointed out that the White man does not fight with single weapon, he has so many.

#### **Conclusion:**

This is how Achebe represents the sufferings of African people at the hands of colonizers. The above-mentioned incidents and events in the novel are the examples of exploitation of Nigerian Igbo people, religion, tradition and their way of living by the colonial administration and Christian Missionary at various levels using many tricks. Thus *Arrow of God* is manifestations of the European exploitation of the Africans.

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