Conflicts, their Resolutions and Social Development: A Study of Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God*

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Abstract
In literary parlance, conflicts exist between protagonist(s) and antagonists) when their relationship is built on mutual hatred, suspicion, distrust, opposition and rivalry. And the resolution of such conflicts is achieved when either the protagonists) or antagonist^) surrenders), is defeated, disappears or dies. In this premise, in Chinua Achebe's Arrow of God, these conflicts are identified: Umuaro and Okperi land dispute, Ezeulu and Captain Winterbottom's personality and philosophical conflict, Ezeulu and Umuaro power/authority conflict, Ezeulu and his deity-Ulu conflict, traditional belief system and Christian belief conflict and Mr. Wright and Obika's age grade conflict. While some of these conflicts were positively resolved, 'others got negative resolution. For instance, the land conflict between Umuaro and Okperi was resolved by Captain Winterbottom through Ezeulu’s truthful witnessing against his people and the confiscation and burning of some of their guns. The sudden and severe fever suffered by Captain Winterbottom resolved the conflict between him and Ezeulu. as Winterbottom was removed from the scene. The mass defection of Umuaro to Christianity solved the problem between Ezeulu and his people and the trouble between traditional religion and Christianity was also solved through Ezeulu’s stubbornness and the mass defection of Umuaro people to the western religion. Mr. Wright's conflict with Obika’s age grade during the road construction was resolved by Captain Winterbottom’s counsel and advice for caution and mutual respect. Ezeulu's rift with Ulu was resolved through Obika’s sudden and painful death during the Ogbazulu Obodo and Ezeulu's eventual heartbreak and mental degeneration. On the -whole, conflicts act as challenges' to human intellect and their resolutions serve as catalyst to peace and social development as evidently demonstrated in *Arrow of God.*

Keywords: Conflicts, Resolutions and Social Development.
Introduction

According to New Webster Dictionary, conflict involves a situation of opposition, quarrels, inconsistency, struggling, violent disputes, aggression, discontentment and clash of interests.

In other words, conflict entails a condition of incompatibility, where there is a strong desire on the part of one party, group of persons, individuals, religion or political association to determine and implement ends, ideas, programmes and objectives which are unacceptable and incompatible with that of the opposition. To this extent, conflict exists between persons, groups or associations when there is mutual distrust, disagreement and misunderstanding as regards interest, ends, objectives and philosophies between the opposition and the proposition. In effect, mutual suspicion and violent or subtle opposition is the heart of the matter in conflicts.

On the above premise, a profound and critical reading of Chinua Achebe's third novel, Arrow of God. (1964) reveals the existence of conflicts at various levels and dimensions. O. R. Dathorne, a renowned critic of African literature agrees that, “Arrow of God is built on conflicts.” According to him:

Because of the psychological problems that Achebe poses through the relationship between Ezeulu, his god (Ulu), his community and the District Officer (DO), Arrow of God is his most ambitious novel. The author attempts to remain detached from the forces in conflict (73).

The important point to note from the above excerpt is that all the conflicts revolve around Ezeulu, directly and/or indirectly. The major conflicts identified in the novel include: The communal land conflict between Okperi and Umuaro; a conflict that eventually culminated to full scale war between the two towns; the conflict between Ezeulu, the Chief Priest of Ulu, and his erstwhile white friend, Captain Winterbottom. This particular conflict gives rise to the conflict between Ezeulu and his people in general and the conflict between Ezeulu and Ezidemili in particular, personified in Nwaka as the spokesman of Ezidemili. There is yet a terrible conflict between Ezeulu and his god, Ulu, as the two seem to be working in diametrically opposing directions and cross purposes.
In addition, the seeming misunderstanding between Ezeulu and Ulu, gives rise to yet another conflict between traditional religion which Ezeulu stands for and protects and the Christian religion which conies as a total opposition to the traditional religious belief. There is also a conflict within Ezeulu himself as a servant of Ulu, his people or himself; a conflict that eventually crushes him.

There is also the conflict between the native authorities such as age grades, council of elders or leaders of thought and the colonial administration as manifested in the conflict between Obika's Age Grade and Mr. Wright during the road construction project between Umuaro and Okperi town.

Finally there is conflict between Ezeulu's wives and children, as is often inevitable in polygamous families; especially the tensions and stresses between a father (Ezeulu) and his grown-up children.

It is important to note as one reads this essay, that while some conflicts were resolved in favour of the protagonist, Ezeulu were indeed resolved to his detriment. The subsequent part of this essay gives a panoramic exploration, exposition and critical discussion of the various conflicts and their eventual resolution.

The expositions and discussions would reveal one of the relevance of Arrow of God as a novel that contains a universal truth of conflicts in the individual, homes, states, churches and nations as the bane of the modern society and a hydraheaded monster that dwarfs growth and development and sometimes and ironically leads to developments.

**Instances of Conflicts and their Resolutions in Arrow of God**

The first notable conflict in the novel was that between the protagonist Ezeulu and his god Ulu. For example, when Ezeulu considered the immensity of his power over the people and Hs influence in the naming of the date for the new yam festival, he and suddenly and painfully realized that the power did not truly belong to him as he was simply acting as a messenger of Ulu, the great god (3). But Ezeulu was not convinced that he was an ordinary messenger of Ulu. Through his statement, one discovers that Ezeulu does not see himself as a messenger, but as the message. According to him; “No, the Chief Priest of Ulu was than that,” because “If he should
refuse to name the day, there would be no festival, no planting and no reaping.” (3) But he cannot refuse to perform his statutory duties because apart from Ulu, the Chief Priest was not supreme over the people, this particular conflict was eventually resolved when Ezeulu, in his stubbornness, pride and bid to revenge for being abandoned by his people in the prisons at Okperi, refused to obey the voice of the Umuaro elders entreating him to eat two yams in one month to save the people from suffering. In spite of all the delegations sent to Ezeulu to plead with him to eat more than one yam in a season - he still refused. It was at the basis of Ezeulu’s stubbornness that Moses Unachukwu advised good country (the Missionary) to tell the people of Umuaro to bring their yams and- other-feni produce to the Christian God, as nothing deadly would happen to anyone who did, and the people - would be free to harvest and plant new yams. The narrator puts the advice of Mr. Unachukwu to the Missionary and what conies as a resolution of the confusion and conflict thus:

So news spread that anyone who did not want to wait and see all his harvest ruined could take his offering to the god of the Christians who claimed to have power of protection from the anger of Ulu (206).

The people were convinced to bring more than one yam to the Christian God; for according to Moses Unachukwu, one of the vibrant Christian converts in Umuaro, “If Ulu who is a false god can eat one yam the living God who owns the world should be entitled to eat more than one.” (216). With the people's response to this call and advice, their previous confusion, suffering and frustration came to an end as nothing indeed happened to those who responded. With this resolution in favour of the people, farming season was restored to Umuaro people and development took over from what could have been static retrogression because of the stubbornness of Ezeulu.

The conflict between Ezeulu and his friend, Captain Winterbottom is the most notable, fundamental and interesting because it generated other conflicts, The reader would recall that the friendship between Captain Winterbottom and Ezeulu was initiated and facilitated by Ezeulu himself by the fetter's truthful witnessing against his own people, Umuaro. The friendship between the duo turned sour, following Ezeulu's blunt refusal /to accept the tide of “a warrant Chief,” bestowed on him by Capitan Winterbottom as a reward for, Ezeulu’s honesty and truthfulness. Ezeulu’s refusal to honor Captain Winterbottom's invitation to Okperi aggravated
the bad blood and misunderstanding between the duo, leading to Ezeulu’s compelled visit to Okperi on the orders of Captain Winterbottom and Ezeulu’s eventual arrest and prolonged detention in Okperi prisons. The conflict between these philosophically and diametrically opposed leaders was resolved by the sudden attack of Captain Winterbottom by a severe and stubborn malaria fever that led to his long hospitalization and treatment by the expatiate medical doctor Miss Savage. Ezeulu was eventually released from the prisons by Mr. Clarke for want of evidence and tangible reasons for his continued detention. The scenario is captured in these lines:

But Clarke was not the person to lock a man up without fully satisfying his own conscience that justice had not only been done but appeared to have been done. What had worried him was this: If he kept the fellow in jail what would he say was his offence. Then one morning on the eighth day, Eke market, he was suddenly told he was free to go home. (177-78).

Ezeulu’s sudden release from Okperi prisons brought the conflict between him and Captain Winterbottom to an end and gave room for social peace and development Dathorne captured the conflict between the priest of Ulu and Winterbottom thus:

Arrow of God (1964) examines the problem of Africaa tradition and new European modes through the relationship between a priest and his god, the preserver of the old and Captain Winterbottom, the upholder of the new. Though they respect each other, they are too far apart, too sure of their own area of authority to compromise (72).

The uncompromising attitude of the two leaders, representing two distinct cultures was resolved by Mr. Clarke. The resolution led to further development in the novel. Similarly, the rivalry and conflict between Ulu and Idemili deities on one hand and Ezeulu and Ezidemili on the other, often inflamed by Nwaka (the spokesman of Ezidemili) is noticed in the frequent attack of Ezeulu by Nwaka. In a swift response of Ezeulu to Ezidemili’s messenger sent by the latter to explain how Ezeulu intended to cleanse the land which his son Oduche had polluted by the imprisonment of the sacred python, Ezeulu angrily at the messenger:

Go back and tell Ezidemili to eat shit. Do you hear me? Tell him Ezidemili that Ezeulu says he should go and fill his mouth with shit. If you want to do anything with your life, take my advice, and say not another word (54).
Commenting on the rivalry between Ezeulu and Ezidemili and invariably between Ulu and Idemili, Emmanuel Obiechina, in an article entitled: The Human Dimension of History in Arrow of God" said:

The authority of the Chief Priest of Ulu is under active attack from the Priest of Idemili who uses his kinsman, the wealthy, volatile and demagogic titled elder Nwaka of Umunnera. Idemili is one of the old gods relegated to the subordinate status by the coming of Ulu (171).

The conflict between the two gods and their priests was accentuated by Nwaka, who, being of jealous of Ezeulu accused him thus:

The man who carries a deity is not a king. He is there to perform his god's ritual and any 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 (27).

This conflict was resolved when the relationship and friendship between Ezeulu and Captain Winterbottom was soured, leading to the former's invitation to Okperi his arrest and long detention that disorganized the cultural calendar of Umuaro and, the eventual defection of many of Umuaro people to Christianity, the new religion.

Similarly, the conflict between Umuaro and their immediate neighbours? Okperi was resolved through Ezeulu’s courageous witnessing against his people Umuaro and the intervention by Captain Winterbottom, who employed superior military armament to stop the savage war between the two warring communities over the rightful ownership of a piece of land. The local i fighters guns were confiscated and burnt while some were reserved by Winterbottom as historical artifacts. For instance, in response to Mr. Clarke’s question about the source of the local guns in Mr. Winterbottom’s office, the latter replied:

Those guns have a long and interesting history. The people of Okperi and their neighbours, Umuaro, are great enemies... A big savage war had broken out between them over a piece of land. This feud was made worse by the fact that Okperi welcomed missionaries and governments Umuaro, on the other hand, has remained backward.
It was only in the last four or five years that any kind of impression has been made. This change came about after I had gathered and publicly destroyed all their arms in the place except, of course, this collection here (37).

It is important to note that Captain Winterbottom’s act of stopping the savage war and seizing and destroying the guns earned him the awesome name of Otiji-Egbe-Breaker of guns (37). It is also informative that Captain Winterbottom’s stoppage of the war between the two warring communities, Umuaro’s acceptance of Christianity and government brought tremendous developmental stride in the towns as Captain Winterbottom indicated in the excerpt above.

There is yet another conflict within Ezeulu as a human being and Ezeulu as a priest of Ulu. As a human being, he had no powers over his people Umuaro and as a priest, he has no power of his own. He merely represents Ulu, the god. This situation was captured by the narrator when he said:

His (Ezeulu) 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 (3).

It is his confusion over the limits of his powers as Ezeulu, the powerful man of Umuaro, and Ezeulu, the Chief Priest of Ulu, that led him, first to reject the offer of a warrant Chief by Captain Winterbottom; second to refuse an invitation by the former to visit him at Okperi and third, his eventual arrest by the white man and detention at Okperi prisons. It is his inability to separate his roles as Ezeulu, the man, and Ezeulu, the priest, that made him to reject all the counsels and appeals to him by the elders of Umuaro when he came back from Okperi prisons, to take two yams at a time. This conflict was resolved when not only the people of Umuaro but also their god, Ulu, abandoned him to his peril. This view was supported by Emmanuel Obiechina when he opined that:

On yet another level belong the conflict taking place within the Chief Priest himself, a conflict between personal power, the temptation to constitute himself into an “arrow” of God and the exigencies of public responsibility (170).

There is every tendency for a less critical reader to notice the little rivalry and indeed conflicts
between Ezeulu’s wives and their children from different mothers. These were not unexpected in a polygamous family. For example, when Ojiugo, Matefi’s daughter brought Ezeulu’s supper to him, she ordered Nwafor to leave Ezeulu’s Obi and go to his mother’s hut. “Go to I your mother’s hut; she has finished cooking” (9) Ezeulu warned her to leave the boy alone (9). The conflict is clearly shown when Ojiugo reported to her mother, Matefi, that Nwafor ate from the bowel of food she served Ezeulu.

Matefi was visibly angry. She poured out her venom and hatred on her co-wife in these words: Do you blame a vulture for perching over a carcass? What do you expect a boy to do when his mother cooks soup with locust beans for fish? She saves her money to buy ivory bracelets. But Ezeulu will not see anything wrong in what she does. If it is me, then he knows what to say (10-11).

The intra-family rivalry was further noticed when Oduche and Ojiugo fought on their way to the stream; a fight that eventually spread to other members of Ezeulu’s family. The crux of the matter was Ojiugo’s reference to Oduche’s imprisonment of the sacred python in his school box. The ugly scene is, captured thus:

Did he kill it. We were told he only put it in his box. What she said reached Oduche's ears. He immediately rushed at Ojiugo and gave her thunder on the face (127).

Ezeulu never allowed this intra-family conflicts to escalate as he often ruled his family with an iron hand. Even Ezeulu’s open preference for Obika to his first son, Edogo, brought a lot of conflicts which the tragic and untimely death of Obika resolved the conflicts within Ezeulu himself were indeed enormous. He did not know whether the power and authority he seemed to be welding and exercising belonged to him or to Ulu, the god. No wonder he saw himself as a man with dual personality: a human being and a spirit at the same time. For example, his human part made him to send his son Oduche to the white man's school to be his “eyes” and to get his “share” in the new dispensation whereas his spirit being compelled him to resist the new religion by refusing the warrant chieftaincy title from Captain Winterbottm. And when he started having problems with Mr. Nwaka, his rival had this to say:

The white man is Ezeulu’s friend and has sent for him. What is so strange about that? He did not send for me. He dud cot send for Udeozo; he did not send for the priest of
Idemils; he did not send for the priest of Era; he did not send for the priest of Udo; nor did lie ask the priest of Ogwugwu to come and see him. He has asked Ezeulu, why? Because they are friends. \(^1\) ... Did not our elders tell us that as soon as we shake hands with a leper, he will want an embrace? It seems that Ezeulu has shaken hands with a man of white body (a leprosy person) (143).

What engenders conflicts in human relations is contradictions and inconsistencies. These were found in great quantity in Ezeulu. The contradictions and conflicts in Ezeulu concerning the limits of his powers as a priest of Ulu, his relationship with Captain Winterbottom were solved when Ezeulu was subtly invited to Okperi by his friend Winterbottom and detained for two months. It was during the detention period that he, Ezeulu realized the limits of his powers, whom Captain Winterbottom really is and how Umuaro people consider and value their Chief Priest. It was during the period of his detention that Ezeulu realized himself as being totally on his own and as a lone ranger.

The greatest conflict in *Arrow of God* is between Ezeulu and Ulu, the god he served as its priest. It is not clear whether Ulu was on the side of the people or on the side of Ezeulu. It however appears that Ulu was not on the side of Ezeulu. Otherwise, why was Ezeulu abandoned by the people of Umuaro during his detention at Okperi prisons and Ulu did nothing to protect him? Why did Ulu allow the untimely, sudden and painful death of Obika, a son so dear to Ezeulu? Why did Ulu allow Ezeulu; to suffer madness following the traumatic effects of Obika's death? It would appear that the “arrow of the god Ulu” was totally used against Ezeulu, the chief priest of Ulu without any justification. The ugly and painful scenario was captured in these words by the sympathetic narrator. According to him:

At any other time Ezeulu would have been more than a match to his grief. He would have been equal to any pain not compounded with humiliation. 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 divined the god's will and obeyed it? When was it ever heard that a child was scalded by the piece of yam its own mother put in his palm? What man would send his son with a potsherd to bring fire from a neighbour’s hut and then unleash rain on him? Who ever sent his son up the palm tree 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 (229).

All the rhetorical questions point at the things that were abominations and impossibilities in the past but which have taken place in the present dispensation in order to prove that things had indeed fallen apart in Umuaro as it had earlier fallen apart in Umuofia.

The resolution of the conflict between Ezeulu and Ulu came, when Ulu, advertently or inadvertently destroyed Ezeulu by allowing his very dear son Obika to die during the Ogbazulu Obodo episode. The sudden death of Obika destroyed whatever remained of Ezeulu emotionally, psychologically, physically and mentally. And, Ulu, in destroying Ezeulu, his Chief servant, invariably destroyed himself because the Umuaro people abandoned both Ezeulu and his powerless god to embrace the Christian religion. So one is not profoundly surprised when the narrator said:

Then a god, finding himself powerless, might take flight and in one final, backward glance at his abandoned worshippers cry: If the, rat cannot flee fast enough, let him make way for the tortoise (229).

Therefore, Ulu, the powerless rat, had given way to the powerful tortoise - the Christian religion and Umuaro would never be the same again. O. R Dathome aptly captured the above situation in these lines partly lifted from the novel:

The tragedy of Ezeulu decisively articulated at the end of the art book, is the tragedy of Okonkwo and Obi. Their god had taken sides with ambitious priest and thus upheld the wisdom of their ancestors that no man however great was greater than his people; that no man ever won judgment against his clan, like Okonkwo and Obi, Ezeulu seeks to make himself greater than the collective wisdom of the clan, like them he dares to individuate his role as a tribesman, and like them he fails (73).

The message is simple; when a leader assumes the position and role of a god and relegates the collective will of his people to the background, he advertently or inadvertently begins the end of his journey as a leader.

The last, though not the least, is the conflict between Mr. Wright, the expatriate in charge of the
road construction project from Okperi to Umuaro, and some age grades in Umuaro, who were compelled to work on the road without pay (76). The conflict came to its climax when Obika was publicly flogged by Mr. Wright because the former came late to the work site. The scene is reported thus:

Mr. Wright's irritation mounted dangerously. Although the white man always carried a whip in his right hand, he had rarely used it... Mr Wright who, unable to control his anger anymore, lashed out violently with his whip. It flashed again and this time caught, Obika around the ear and stung him into fury (81-82).

This violent act against the hardworking age grade by Mr. Wright sparked off a rift and conflict between the white man and Obika's age grade. Mr. UnacKukwu's wisdom in presenting the white man as greatly invincible cowed the youths down by sending cold shivers down their spine. He told the age grade members:

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

This particular conflict was resolved in favour of the white man who injected seriousness and fear in the age grade members, who now worked without compensation, complaint and confrontation.

**Conclusion**

Among Chinua Achebe's critical colonial novels, Arrow of God is without doubt, a compendium of intra and inter family, deity, personal and communal conflicts that culminated not only to the decline of the influence and devastation of the “priest king”, Ezeulu, but also to the demystification of the power and role of the god - Ulu, and indeed, the erosion of the ancestral belief system and religious backbone of the Umuaro people. The above viewpoint is accentuated by Emmanuel Obiechina in an article entitled: “The Human Dimension of History in Arrow of God.” According to him:

When the story opens, the authority of the chief priest is under active attack from the priest of Idemili who uses his kinsman, the wealthy, volatile and demagogic titled elder
Nwaka of Umunneora. Idemili is one of the old gods relegated to subordinate status by
the coming of Ulu. ... Ezeulu is aware of this. He (Ezeulu) knew that the priests of
Idemili, Ogwugwu and Era and Udb had never been happy with their secondary role since
the villages got together and made Ulu and put him over the older deities (171).

So, in a society where the gods are in conflict with one another, the priests of the gods do not see
eye to eye; the head of the colonial authority is in disagreement with the representative of the
traditional belief system. Where Ezenlu’s one leg is in the Christian culture and belief through
his representative son, Oduche while his other leg is rooted in traditionalism and Ezeulu does not
understand the ways of the god he serves, things are bound to fall apart, as the arrow in the hands
of the god Ulu is shot at his loyal servant. It would therefore not be surprising for a critical reader
to notice that things in Umuano are no longer at ease.

It is however significant to note that like the people of Umuofia, Umuaro clearly saw the futility
in fighting and preventing positive change that comes with development. The Umuaro people
demonstrated this understanding by collectively abandoning their embattled-proud, stubborn and
inflexible chief priest to embrace Christianity that seemed to offer hope for freedom, literacy,
physical development and spiritual salvation from darkness.

Works Cited
