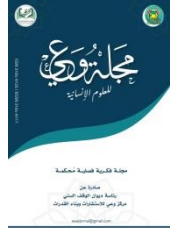




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## Fragmented Identity: Postcolonial Memory in Achebe's Arrow of God

تفكيك الهوية والذاكرة ما بعد الاستعمارية في رواية "سهم الرب" لتشينوا أتشيبى

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### الكلمات المفتاحية:

المفتاحية:

التفاوض

الجماعي -

الحوار الاجتماعي

- منازعات العمل

الجماعية -

الاتفاقيات الدولية

و العربية .

تتناول هذه الورقة البحثية مفهوم نفتت الهوية في سياق رواية "سهم الإله" لتشينوا أتشيبى (1930-2013) ضمن إطار الذاكرة ما بعد الاستعمارية. وبالاستناد إلى الإطار النظري لهومي لهومي بهابها ونظرياته حول التهجين والفضاء الثالث، تُبين الدراسة أنه لا توجد هوية ثابتة وموحدة في الرواية، بل هي هوية منكرة التشكيل في ظل ظروف الهيمنة الاستعمارية والصراعات الثقافية الداخلية. ومن خلال دراسة شخصية إيزولو ومجتمع الإيغبو كدراسة مقارنة ونقدية، تدرس هذه الورقة البحثية كيف تعمل الذاكرة، بوصفها مكاناً لحفظ التراث الثقافي ومكاناً للانقسام في آن واحد. وتشير هذه النتائج إلى أن نفتت الهوية في الرواية ليس مجرد نتيجة لتدخل المستعمرين، بل هو تناقض داخلي في النظام المحلي. وأخيراً، يُضيف هذا البحث إلى خطاب ما بعد الاستعمار من خلال تسليط الضوء على العلاقة المعقدة بين الهوية والذاكرة والسلطة. تستخدم هذه الدراسة نظرية ما بعد الاستعمار لإعادة النظر في جوانب التنوع الثقافي بين شعب الإيغبو الأفريقي، والتي يهددها تدخل الاستعمار الأوروبي باسم الدين والنقد والحضارة. تركز الدراسة على التحليل النصي على إيزولو كدراسة حالة، مستخدماً تصورات متعددة، مثل الصراع بين السلطة الطقسية والحادثة الاستعمارية، ودور الذاكرة كعامل توحيد وتقسيم في آن واحد، والأسباب الداخلية والخارجية لأزمة الهوية.

**Keywrds:**

***Identity,  
Postcolonialism,  
Memory, Igbo  
people and  
culture***

**Abstract**

In this paper, the concept of fragmentation of identity is discussed in relation to *Arrow of God* (1964) by the author Chinua Achebe (1930–2013) within the framework of postcolonial memory. By relying on theoretical framework of Homi K. Bhabha and his theories of hybridity and the Third Space, the given study states that there is no fixed, unified identity in the novel, but it is negotiated under the conditions of colonial domination and inner cultural conflicts. By critically examining the character of the person, Ezeulu, and the Igbo community, the paper shows how memory, both as a place of cultural preservation and as a place of division, works. These results indicate that identity fragmentation in the novel is not just a result of the interference of the colonizers, but internal contradiction of the indigenous system. Finally, the research adds to the discourse of postcolonialism as it puts emphasis on the complicated connection between identity, memory and power. This study employs postcolonial theory to reconsider aspects of cultural diversity among the African Igbo people, which are threatened by the intervention of European colonialism in the name of religion, progress, and civilization. Textual Analysis and evidence of this work focuses on Ezeulu as a case study which using various insightful points as conflict between ritual authority versus colonial modernity role of memory as both unifying and divisive internal versus external causes of identity crisis

**Introduction**

Chinua achebe was born in the village of Ogidi. In this he grew up in the Eastern part of what is now Anambre state, Nigeria. Painfully distressed period of transition. Being the son of a Christian catechist, Achebe was given a strict Christian upbringing, the greater part of the rest of those about him had led an old-fashioned life. They would carry out all their traditional and ethnic ceremonies and sing hymns in. their prayer. The colonial situation of Africa had

a great influence upon the lives and most of the African writers such as Achebe were educated by it and became their novels as well on their subject matter. He read the novels of Joseph Conrad and Graham Greene in his college and the response of Achebe to the. Using these novels, representations of African people and African culture have had an impact on. great impact on his writings.  
(Menon 20-21)

As a literature, postcolonial continues to question the precarious nature of identity within societies that are influenced by the disruptive power of colonial domination and cultural change. In these circumstances, identity cannot be envisaged as something that is fixed or singular instead, identity is an object of contestation and discontinuity that is created by the interplay of history, power, and memory. *Arrow of God* gives a subtle examination of this state through its showcasing of Igbo society at a point of transition at the point of critical encounter with the colonies. The external intrusion of the British colonial powers is not the only thing that is foreshadowed in the novel but the internal struggle that destabilises native systems of meaning, therefore, revealing the multifaceted processes through which identity is being fractured and reconstituted.

Ezeulu, the chief priest of Ulu, is the main character in this story, the role of which embodies the combination of the power of the spirit, continuation of the cultures and the life of the community. The role of Ezeulu, however, is under more and more threat as the administrative mechanisms of a colonial society and the influence of missionaries break-in upon the traditional systems of power.

The strictly strict value of ritual authority along with the inability to maneuver the shifting socio-political environment makes his identity precarious and torn apart. As Ezeulu, who maintains a self-conception as protector of tradition, implies, when Achebe mentions that the chief priest of Ulu is more than a priest (Achebe 6) this claim only weakens his position in a world of transition which is as much as to say that his authority is here to stay. The personal crisis confronting Ezeulu will therefore extend to the community, in which there is a shattering of the community interpretations of tradition and adjustment, which create conflict, and disharmony.

This study relies on the postcolonial discourse of Bhabha to theorize this fragmentation because his concept of hybridity is strongly opposed to the essentialist notions of identity that underlie it and its ambivalent and constructed

nature. According to Bhabha, there is a Third Space of enunciation that is created during colonial interactions, where cultural meaning is bargained and made unstable and thus makes any identity to be inherently fluid and indeterminate (54). In this context, Ezeulu is in the middle ground that does not allow total absorption of colonial systems and total maintenance of the traditional power. Such liminal condition highlights the non-existence of keeping a single self in the presence of colonial modernity.

In addition, postcolonial memory complicates identity formation by playing the role it plays in *Arrow of God*. Memory serves as a storehouse of cultural information and experience that is shared but turns out to be a space of conflict where there is a challenge to the pressures of change in the community. According to Bhabha, cultural identity is not a predetermined gift but the ongoing negotiation that is conditioned by contingencies of history (112). This negotiation is characterized by antagonism in the Achebe story, with the upholding of tradition coming more and more into conflict with the realities of a colonial present. Memory, therefore, does not preserve identity: it plays a role in the fragmentation of the self by being vulnerable itself to the contradictions of efforts to unite with past and present.

In this paper, it is argued that *Arrow of God* develops a sense of identity into a fragmented and unstable object that is manifested in the interruption of colonial power, cultural memory and social divisions within the country. By critically analyzing the character of Ezeulu as well as the group dynamics of the Igbo community, the paper proves that the identity crises in the novel is not only imposed by the colonialist powers but also a creation of the cultural system itself. In conclusion, the work by Achebe brings out the concept that postcolonial identity is one that is characterized by ambivalence and negotiation and the persistent tension of continuity and change.

Similarly, even the concept of postcolonialism is very much concerned with all the cultural, political and psychological implications of the colonial rule. The term postcolonial as explained by Stephen Slemon should not carry the impression of a time-bound term to indicate the postnatal epoch of independence, but rather it must be understood in a critical manner as a mode of approach that challenges continuing presence of colonial power structure within the culture discourse and social arrangements (3). One of the major themes in postcolonial writings is the issue of cultural identity, the tensions between the colonialism and the colonies and the need to confront the aftermath of colonial

domination. Narrative representation also provides writers with a voice when the authors express emotional and psychological traumas that came with colonialism and political violence.

### **Fragmented Identity in Achebe's *Arrow of God***

*Arrow of God* is a very subtle treatment of fragmented identity in the figure of Ezeulu, a spiritual leader or orisha as well as a colonial subject, who is torn and torn by the duality of his status. Ezeulu is torn in-between his traditional identity as the chief priest of Ulu and the destabilizing effects of the British colonial power which aims at redefining the power of the indigenous people. As Achebe shows, the feeling of self is growing more and more unstable as Ezeulu tries to establish his authority in both spheres, which leads to his isolation. This division can be seen in the case when Ezeulu insists, "I am merely Ulu's servant. It is not for me to say when the New Yam Feast will be held" (201) and this shows his strict obedience to the divine authority at the expense of his membership in the community. Critics suggest that this scene highlights a crisis of identity since the personal agency of "Ezeulu's tragedy lies in his inability to negotiate the competing demands of tradition and modernity" (Nnoromele 154). Moreover, this fragmentation is compounded by the

introduction of colonial apparatus, when Ezeulu is invited to become a “white man’s chief, a role he rejects but cannot fully escape in its implications” (Achebe 134). His rejection fails to rebuild his unified identity and instead, it exaggerates his displacement as he is caught between two incompatible systems of meaning. According to Simon Gikandi, Ezeulu is a tragedy in that he could not compromise the demands of tradition and modernity (78). Finally, through the psychological and social fragmentation of Ezeulu, Achebe shows the way in which colonialism splits not only political organizations but the principles of individual and cultural identity as well.

A different aspect of fragmented identity can be seen in the relationship that is crumbling between Ezeulu and his community, the collective identity that has been destroyed in Umuaro. The priest is traditionally a central figure but his strictness in observing the rituals of the people and his insistence on ritual observance causes him to be alien to his people. The way he did not refer to the New Yam Festival as “the time had not come” (Achebe 201). shows that his interests in divine teaching superseded communal survival. This move tears apart the communal connection that has delineated his power and his identity. As Eustace Palmer notes, Ezeulu is “a victim of his own inflexibility, cut off

from the society that gave him meaning” (65). The fact that Ulu was later abandoned by the community in favor of Christianity not only signifies the onset of religious change, but also the inefficacy of Ezeulu as the spiritual centre of the community.

Narrative perspective and irony are also means by which Achebe brings forth the inner disintegration of the consciousness of Ezeulu. On the one hand, Ezeulu sees himself as a loyal servant of Ulu, but on the other hand, the story reveals the inconsistency of the actions of this person. A practical approach to colonial modernity that contradicts his external opposition is seen in the way he sends his son Oduhe to the missionary school so that he could see what is happening on the ground there (55). This duality presents a split self, who is moving between adaptation and preservation. Biodun Jeyifo, among other critics, argues that the character of Ezeulu is representative of the divided consciousness of a transition society (Jeyifo 41). Achebe uses these contradictions to show identity as not present but instead as a disputed and unstable concept in a shifting and socio-political environment.

In the end, the disintegration of the identity of Ezeulu results in the disintegration of the individual and culture. His power is undermined when the

society rejects Ulu and resorts to Christianity not only as a religious change, but also as a break of his identity as a religious figure. Achebe is able to depict this demise in a heartrending manner when he states that the power of Ezeulu was lost and his mind was shattered (Achebe 230). His son Obika also dies, which is another symbol of the loss of the rest of his meaning of purpose, which solidifies the tragic results of his split personality. By depicting the psychological and social disintegration of Ezeulu, Achebe illustrates how colonialism does not only disintegrate the political structures but also the basis of individual and cultural identity, placing the subject in an irreconcilable crisis of selfhood.

### **Postcolonial Memory and Cultural Conflict**

*Arrow of God* is an intensely nuanced portrayal of a fragmented identity in the form of the postcolonial memory and cultural conflict, specifically the character of Ezeulu whose status as the chief priest of Ulu and colonial subject creates a person of a highly divided identity. Ezeulu's identity is based on the sacred tradition, but it is constantly challenged by the intrusive logic of British colonialism, which tries to rewrite the native structures of authority and memory. At the very beginning, Ezeulu identifies himself as a divine

instrumentality: he claims, “I am the arrow in the bow of my god” (Achebe 3). which, at the same time, affirms agency and negates autonomy. But this identity is further broken as the continuity of cultural memory which supports his role is disrupted by the presence of the colonial. His fixation as in “I am merely Ulu’s servant. It is not for me to say when the New Yam Feast will be held” (Achebe 201). is a sign of a strict adherence to ritual time, a time system based on indigenous memory and conflicting with the material demands of the community at the moment. According to Bhabha, colonial encounters result in the formation of a split subject whose identity is created in the interstices of competing cultural narratives (85). Ezeulu represents this dichotomy in that his power rests on a cultural memory which is at once being subverted by colonial modernity.

Memory in *Arrow of God* serves as both a unifying and divisive force. The Igbo community relies on ritual and tradition to preserve cultural identity. However, these same traditions become contested under colonial pressure. Achebe emphasizes the need for adaptation: “A man must dance the dance prevalent in his time” (222). This statement highlights the tension between past

and present. While memory sustains cultural continuity, it also intensifies conflict when it resists change.

This stress is heightened in the experience that Ezeulu has with the colonial administration where cultural clash is expressed not only through resistance but also through internal dislocation. “He declines to be a chief of a white man and says, I will not be the chief of anybody, except Ulu” (Achebe 134). But this denial is not the re-establishment of identity but a further dissection, with the colonial power redefining authority in such a way that makes his traditional role more and more obsolete. Importantly, Ezeulu’s earlier decision to send his son Oduche to the missionary school “to be my eye there” (Achebe 55). proves that he is already a strategically involved participant in the colonial apparatus, which makes it harder to oppose him. This action indicates the internalization of the presence of the colonizer by the colonized subject that divides identity on the psychological level (Fanon 210). Ezeulu, who tries to retain cultural memory by adopting part of the culture, finds himself in a joyful predicament that Oduche refuses to subscribe to the traditional beliefs, which is symbolized by his incarceration of the sacred python and this proves the

disruptive nature of the colonial ideology. The identity of Ezeulu is therefore a place of cultural collision, between conservation and change.

In addition, Achebe employs the erosion of collective memory to show how fragmented identity is inseparable with the disintegration of the relationship that Ezeulu had with his community. In Umuaro, rituals and temporal cycles are used to ensure continuity of culture but the inflexible perception of divine will by Ezeulu breaks the continuity. His refusal to call the New Yam Festival because “the time had not come” (201) is a sign of rigid adherence to the sacred memory that does not explain the evolving facts of colonial invasion. He prefers ritual purity to communal survival as the people are faced with starvation, and he insists that “those who will eat the new yam must first wait for Ulu” (Achebe 202). Achebe also emphasizes that “a man may refuse to do what his deity commands” (209). This moment is an indication of a crisis not just of leadership but of cultural memory as such since the common belief system that held the community together is crumbling. According to Edward Said, cultural identity during colonialism is turned into a place of struggle and renegotiation (Said 217). This can be well seen in the progressive conversion of Umuaro to Christianity.

Lastly, as the identity of Ezeulu collapses, the fatal effects of the culture conflict and the disrupted memory are made apparent. His power is eventually destroyed not by direct colonial power but by the voluntary abandonment of Ulu by the community as they accept the new religious order brought about by the missionaries. Achebe describes this change with a sudden vehemence: “Ezeulu’s power was gone, and his mind was broken” (230). The fact that the son of Ezeulu, Obika, dies also represents the discontinuity of the generation as the breakdown of the cultural legacy and the loss of the memory itself. Here, the demise of Ezeulu is not just personal but symbolic of a larger postcolonial predicament, where the clash between the native culture and the colonial modernity causes irreparable identity splits. Simon Gikandi notes that the tragedy of Ezeulu is that he is unable to reconcile the conflicting demands of history, memory and change (Gikandi 78). By this description, Achebe shows that colonialism is not merely an external domination but at a deeper level it ruptures the internal unity of the self and the culture itself, leaving the colonized in an atmosphere of fragmentation and loss.

## Conclusion

To sum up, *Arrow of God* is a rich and multi-layered reflection on fragmented identity that arises through the crossroads of postcolonial memory and conflict of cultures. By the tragic figure of Ezeulu, Achebe is able to show how the clash between indigenous and colonial modernity creates a profoundly divided subject, a subject who is incapable of balancing the competing needs of spiritual authority, communal responsibility and colonial power. The uncompromising belief by Ezeulu that he is only a servant of Ulu indicates that he is faithful to the sacred tradition and ritual time, but on the other hand, this strictness isolates him among the community whose memory of the sacred man is the one that keeps his power. His identity that has been based on a common cosmology turns out to be more and more isolated as he puts the divine obligation above the human need. Simultaneously, his refusal of the position of the chief of the white mandoes not make him independent; on the contrary, it only makes him even more displaced in a new colonial system, which is redefining power and legitimacy on non-native grounds.

Furthermore, Achebe makes the concept of identity tricky by unveiling that memory itself is a disputed site in the face of colonialism. The tradition, to

which Ezeulu is faithful, is not spiritual but mnemonic because he represents the continuity of the knowledge and ritual cycles of his ancestors. But this continuity is broken by colonialism and domestic unrest, resulting in a loss of personal and group integrity. The ultimate acceptance of Ulu to give way to Christianity by the community is a sign not only of a change in religion, but of a fundamental break in the cultural memory whereby survival is paramount to tradition. In this regard, the tragedy of Ezeulu cannot be understood without the tragedy of Umuaro because individual and social identity is defined by something which they cannot control.

In the end, the demise of Ezeulu, who was captured in the stark awareness of his power loss, and the disintegration of his identity at the hands of colonialism, represents the devastating consequences of stalemate culture clash and the identity loss at the hands of the colonizers. The inability of maintaining a coherent self in the world where the past and the present are irreconcilable is manifested in his psychological breakdown. Achebe, therefore, shows that identity is not absolute or stable, but historically contingent and subject to dislocation. Describing the loss of spiritual power, the degradation of communal identity, the destruction of cultural memory, *Arrow of God* reveals the extensive

psychological and cultural consequences of colonial rule. Fragmentation, here, turns out not to be just a personal state, but the characteristic of the postcolonial experience, which is the loss of a unified self and society. The crisis is both external (colonialism) and internal (cultural tensions). Identity is constructed through conflict, not inherited as stable. Achebe wants his society to move on with pride.

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