

## A Critical Pragmatic Analysis of the Discursive Expression of Power and Dominance in Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God*

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### Abstract

Many studies have described Achebe's *Arrow of God* as a novel that explores struggle for power and dominance. However, these kinds of explorations, which are mainly literary, have merely discussed the dimensions of power struggles in the text without situating the discursive expressions involved in their immediate and wider contexts for a critical pragmatic consideration. There is need to situate the discursive expressions of power struggles in the text in their immediate and wider contexts for a critical pragmatic analysis. This will not only offer a better understanding of the instantiations of the discourses of power relations and struggles in the novel, it will also provide a sound basis for the appreciation of the theme of power and dominance in the text. Data for the study are purposively sampled extracts of discursive expressions of power and dominance in the novel, which were anchored on critical pragmatic framework that incorporates Norman Fairclough's approach to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). This is done because the critical pragmatic framework propounded by Mey (2001) relies heavily on CDA for analysis. It was observed that power and dominance were instantiated in the text through discursive practices.

**Keywords:** Critical pragmatics, Arrow of God, discursive expression, power struggles, CDA

### **Introduction**

Most extant studies on the concept, power, for example Thomas and Wareing (1999), Fairclough (2001), van Dijk (1993), Oni (2010) etc., concentrate on its dimensions and manifestations in natural discourse, particularly in dialogic and conversational modes. There is currently an emerging understanding that it could be studied outside the domain of natural conversations like its deployment in the context of creative works, since such an immediate context is usually a reflection of the wider context that it portrays. Prose, as a form of discourse (particularly at the dialogic plane between characters), also involves power intrigues especially in discursive conflict situations. It would therefore be necessary to extend the study of power intrigues to this genre. This, coupled with the fact that Achebe's *Arrow of God* is a novel that is epochal in the portrayal of the reactions of Africans to the explosive power games that came with colonialism.

The concept, power, has been examined from different dimensions. Fairclough (2001:38), for example, sees power as having 'to do with powerful participants controlling and constraining the contribution of non-powerful participants'. Van Dijk (1993) argues that power is equated with influence and control. Thomas and Wareing (1999:10-11) maintains that 'power is quite an abstract concept, an infinitely important influence on our lives' and one way to see power at work in society is through politics. Another very useful view of power is that provided by Brockeriede (1971:313). He sees power as 'the capacity to exert interpersonal influence'.

Power is encoded in the ideological workings of language (Oni, 2010). The features or levels of language which are ideologically invested include all aspects of meaning – lexical meaning,

presupposition, implicatures, coherence, entailment etc. and formal features of texts. This accounts for Fairclough's (1995:74) arguments that ideology resides both in meanings and formal features of texts. This view reveals the relevance of meanings and formal features as tools for encoding power in discourse.

In discussing the functioning of power in discourse, Oha (1994:110) asserts that 'to understand how power functions as a constraint in discourse, we need to consider the differences between the social roles of speakers and their audiences, and the implications of such social roles of the speakers and their audiences, and the implications of such social roles for discourse roles. The social roles that exist between Ezeulu and his traditional Igbo society and between the British colonial machinery and the colonised Igbo society in particular are those of rulers and the ruled. The machinery of British colonialism that is represented in Achebe's *Arrow of God* wields imperialist power over the colonised population that is represented in the novel as a result of the authority vested in it by the British government. The traditional priestly authority conferred on Ezeulu as the chief priest of Ulu also vested in him the power to control the traditional order in the society. Hence, just as Oni (2010) argues, this authority or power becomes 'natural' and even when such power is deployed to dominate, suppress or oppress, it is usually not visible because it has become 'natural' or 'commonsensical' (Fairclough, 2001).

Achebe's works, no less *Arrow of God*, have enjoyed enormous scholarly attention. Most studies on *Arrow of God* such as Nnolim (2011), Kortenaar (1995), Kalu (1994), Wren (1981), Nwoga (1981), Obiechina (1975), Ojinmah (1991), Mathuray (2003), Aning and Nsiah (2012), Akwanya (2013) etc. are mainly literary and philosophical. These literary critics have focused on setting, style, conflict etc., in terms of cultural, political and religious dimensions. The work has enjoyed only little attention from the linguistic approach. Alabi's (2009) linguistic study of Achebe's work did not

account for the linguistic encoding of power in his novels. Even studies such as Mathuray (2003), Gikandi (1991) etc. which have explored certain purely literary dimensions of power and ideology in the novel did not hinge their studies on any linguistic theory for analysis. This leaves so much yet to be done in a linguistic enterprise. These scholars also failed to isolate specific discursive expressions of power in the novel for discussion, taking clues from their immediate and wider contexts of deployment. This means that the power that is encoded in the ideological workings of the linguistic forms that were deployed in the novel was not given critical consideration.

In the light of the identified gap above, this present study investigates the functions of linguistic features that are used discursively to encode power in Achebe's *Arrow of God*. The study seeks to unmask the aspect of power that the ideological discursive practices of the rulers reflect with a view to determining the interpersonal components of linguistic features that instantiate power. To realise this, this study explores, from the perspective of critical pragmatics and systemic functional linguistics (SFL), those linguistic variables that express power in the novel, paying critical attention to the immediate context of the novel and the wider context that the novel portrays.

### **Critical Pragmatics**

Like critical linguistics (Fowler et al, 1979), which puts great emphasis on the relationship between social power and language use, Mey's (2001) critical pragmatics incorporates the critical discourse traditions of Teun van Dijk and mainly the critical language awareness tradition of the Lancaster School that is centred on Norman Fairclough and his co-workers. Therefore, just like in the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) tradition, 'critical' when applied to pragmatics has to do with examining the fundamental relations that assign power to various groups in society, particularly

viewing language as an important instrument of exercising power and paying critical attention to the context of use. Critical pragmatics draws attention to the fact that pragmatics is a tool for social struggle. It seeks to critically examine, and try to understand the social functioning of language and its various manifestations of use.

Critical pragmatics operates from the viewpoint of language as a social science. It argues that different language use is not just a matter of linguistic variation, to be described as classified in purely theoretical terms, or to be analysed with the aid of sociological variables denoting class or other societal parameters. The main impact, as Mey (2001) argues, is in the ways it helps us to recognise social discrimination and motivates us to work toward ending it. He argues further that from a critically pragmatic perspective, what conversation analysts should primarily worry about is how the mechanisms of linguistic deployments are related to the powers of society that operate in discourse (including, but not limited to conversation).

Under the critical pragmatic perspective, the truly interesting aspects of conversations (speech acts) are in the different ways they manifest themselves in different user contexts. So using language in conversation can be many things: from an exchange between equals on the job or in the home, to 'passing the time of day' with strangers, to specialised types of conversation such as the medical or job interview, or even the conversations with the police or other authorities. The purposes and affordances of conversation, as of any other use of language, are strictly determined by the social setting (in particular, the institution) in which it occurs. Pragmatics, therefore, especially in its social-critical variety, aims at increasing freedom and independence by making the users of language conscious of, unveil and (if necessary) oppose the institutional and linguistic conditions of power that they are living under. What characterises power as a social factor is not its brute force as such,

but rather, its being accepted as a natural thing. According to Mey, 'naturalisation is said to happen whenever what should be critically examined and resisted is taken as a natural matter, with the self-evidence of the commonsensical' (318). This commonsensical or naturalised dimensions of discourse is critically examined and untied, paying critical attention to the contexts of their manifestations both at the immediate and the wider levels within the framework of critical pragmatic theory.

### **Methodology and Framework for Analysis**

Data for the study are purposively sampled extracts of discursive expressions of power and dominance in the novel, which were anchored on critical pragmatic theory which incorporates Norman Fairclough's approach to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). This is done because the critical pragmatic framework propounded by Mey incorporates the tenets of CDA for analysis. Specifically, two dimensions of discursive instantiations of power in the novel would be examined in this study. First, the dimension of power structured into the interactions of Ezeulu, the custodian of the traditional order in the novel and his people. Secondly, the power instantiated discursively by the agents of imperialism in their interactions with Ezeulu and the Umuaro people.

Textual analysis in this study is hinged on the tenets of critical pragmatics which incorporates Norman Fairclough's approach to CDA. CDA is a multidisciplinary approach to discourse that aligns itself with the dominated groups to address social problems and political issues. It pays attention to the way specific discourse structures are deployed in the reproduction of social dominance. As highlighted by Fairclough and Wodak (1997:271-280), the main tenets of CDA can be summarised as follows:

- CDA addresses social problems
- Power relations are discursive
- Discourse constitutes society and culture

- Discourse does ideological work
- Discourse is historical
- The link between text and society is mediated
- Discourse analysis is interpretive and explanatory
- Discourse is a form of social action

The highlights above form some of the central concerns of CDA. The study of implicit ideology is a central concern of CDA. It is an analytical framework that seeks to uncover connections between discourse practices, social practices, and social structures, connections that may be opaque to text consumers (Oni, 2010). According to Wodak (1999:8), CDA tries to ‘unmask ideologically permeated and often obscured structures of power, political control, and dominance... in language use’.

Three major approaches to CDA have been identified in the literature. These are the discourse historical approach of Ruth Wodak (1996, 2002), which focuses on the historical perspective of discourse in the process of interpretation and explanation; the socio-cognitive approach of Teun van Dijk (1993, 1995, 1996), which views discourse from the cognitive angle; and the socio-semiotic approach that is championed by Norman Fairclough (1989, 1992, 1999, 2001), which draws heavily on the Hallidayan functional linguistic study of discourse. There is also a cognitive dimension to Fairclough’s approach; this he calls members’ resources (MR). This captures the aspect of text production and interpretation ‘which people have in their heads and draw upon when they produce or interpret texts – including their knowledge of language, representations of the natural and social worlds they inhabit, values, beliefs, assumptions, and so on’ (Fairclough 2001:20). The MR, which is internalised, is socially generated, and its nature is dependent on the social relations and struggles out of which it was generated. Social conditions shape the MR that manifests in the production and interpretation of texts. MR is crucial to our analysis in this study.

Even though the three approaches differ, they have a shared concern with the study of implicit ideology in discourse. Ideologies are captured in the familiar common sense world of everyday life, a world which is built entirely upon assumptions and expectations which control both the actions of members of a society and their interpretation of the actions of others (Garfinkel 1967; Fairclough 2001). Such assumptions and expectations, Fairclough argues, are 'implicit, backgrounded, taken for granted, not things that people are consciously aware of, rarely explicitly formulated or examined or questioned' (64). The implicit nature of ideology helps in sustaining power relations (Oni 2010). The exercise of power is achieved through the ideological workings of language. In view of this, van Dijk (1996) holds that attention should be focused on the description and explanation of how power abuse is enacted, reproduced or legitimised.

Halliday's interpersonal component of discourse focuses on the expression of the speaker's 'angle': his/her attitude and judgments, his/her encoding of the role relationships in the situation, and his/her motive in saying anything at all (Halliday and Hasan 1976). It is a functional dimension of language that is captured by mood and modality. Within the systemic functional grammar tradition, the mood and modality systems are seen as key interpersonal components that help speakers to project the power or solidarity of their relationship; the extent of their intimacy; their level of familiarity with each other; and their attitudes and judgments (Eggins 2004).

The mood system, according to Halliday (1973a), is divided into indicative and imperative mood systems. The indicative mood is further subdivided into declarative, interrogative, modal and non-modal subsystems. These options are realised in terms of the insertion and concatenation of elements of clause structure: for instance, indicative clauses contain a subject, while imperative clauses do not; declarative clauses have the order SP (Subject,

Predicator), while interrogative clauses have P<S>, the subject either following or being included inside the predicator (Butler 1985). Generally, mood can be equated with the selection of a communication role by the speaker (stating, questioning, requesting, etc.), and the allocation of role choices to the hearer.

#### **Data presentation and analysis**

Achebe's *Arrow of God* is a depiction of a fictional Igbo community that is made up of six villages collectively known as Umuaro, which falls within the larger colonial territory christened Nigeria, where the colonial administrative and military apparatus and the missionary presence are only beginning to make themselves felt. Achebe tells the story of a community that defines itself by shared symbols (local deities and established rituals, as well as a proverbial wisdom) and by symbolic boundaries. Individuals invest shared symbols with various meanings, about which there is disagreement. The British intrusion forces Umuaro to redefine itself, but its culture has always been subject to redefinition. The villages invented the god Ulu to unite them when they were threatened by Abam slave-raiders. If ever things were in danger of falling apart, it was then; instead a new identity was constructed and given religious legitimacy. Umuaro is best understood through the will of its members to narrate a collective identity. The presence of the colonizers occasions an internal debate in Umuaro.

The crisis in the novel is a contest between rival interpretations that are also rival strategic responses to the historical moments of the community. *Arrow of God* is not so much concerned with the society as with Ezeulu himself. He is established in a closely-knit society, and it is in his relationship with this community and also with other elements or factors in this setting that one is able to comprehend the problem that he is faced with. Ezeulu and his culture are one. There exists a genuine struggle between Ezeulu and his rivals in his own clan, the British administrators and

Christian missionaries. But the struggle does not get down to the root of the matter. Achebe's novel is concerned with inter-clan conflict and with the Chief Priest of Ulu who is in conflict with himself. Whatever external forces are brought to bear upon his life are there only as objectifications of what actually goes on inside him.

As mentioned in the methodology, two dimensions of the discursive instantiation of power in the novel were studied. First, the dimension of power structured into the interactions of Ezeulu, the custodian of the traditional order in the novel and his people. Secondly, the power instantiated discursively by the agents of imperialism in their interactions with Ezeulu and his Umuaro people in the novel.

The prelude to the first phase of the manifestation of discursive expression of power can be established at the opening of the novel. Here, the reader is drawn into a dialogue by the narrator in order to parade the enormity of the power that Ezeulu controls. This is captured as something in the realm of feeling. But, such a feeling is not unnatural; many people think about future incapacitations, but this scene establishes the tone for the novel and unveils Ezeulu's internal conflict and his bid to continue to maintain his religious and political relevance. The allusion here is that this impending blindness is a threat, for it will interfere with his ordering of religious festivals, and will even mean that his influence will cease to be felt among his people if he fails to observe the progression of the moon. If his religious responsibility will be challenged, his political responsibility will be in danger. He endeavours to console himself by imagining that he 'was as good as any young man, or better because young men were no longer what they used to be' (*Arrow of God* 1). This gesture is indicative of his desire to maintain a perpetual authority over his clan; he realizes that old age is beginning to tell on him, but this he repudiates.

There is implicit power struggle injected by the omniscient narrator of the novel into the picture painted of the power structure and power relations that hold between Ezeulu and his Umuaro community. The 'unlimited' power enjoyed by Ezeulu, the Chief Priest of Ulu is described by the narrator in the extract below:

**Extract 1**

Whenever Ezeulu considered the immensity of his power over the year and the crops and, therefore, over the people he wondered it was real. It was true he named the day for the feast of the Pumpkin Leaves and for the New Yam feast; but he did not choose it. He was merely a watchman. His power was no more than the power of a child over a goat that was said to be his. As long as the goat was alive it could be his; he would find it food and take care of it. But the day it was slaughtered he would know soon enough who the real owner was. No! [T]he Chief Priest of Ulu was more than that. If he should refuse to name the day there would be no festival – no planting and no reaping (3).

Extract 1 above sets the tone explicitly for the power struggle that is dramatized in the novel between Ezeulu and his Umuaro community. It also sets the stage implicitly for the unfolding power tussle between the instruments of British imperialists and Ezeulu's community. From Extract 1 above, it is clear that Ezeulu is aware that his control over the people is not just religious. We are told whenever he 'considered the immensity of his power over the crops and, therefore, *over the people* he wondered if it was real'. This pragmatic description is laden with oppressive undertone. It is such that presents an oppressor and the oppressed. The power structure here is well defined, Ezeulu the oppressor and his people, the oppressed. This is because his power is described as that which operates *over the people*. Characters in the novel would just commonsensically surrender themselves to the trado-religious institution that vested the power of oversight on their Chief Priest

without consideration for the ideological manoeuvrings that come with such practices. Because Ezeulu is the Chief Priest of Ulu, it is commonsensical, natural and taken for granted that he wields some measure of authority and should be accorded respect. However, it is this commonsensical assumption that he leverages on to instantiate power to oppress his people. As suggested in the text above, his 'immense power' is not just on crops alone, the people that feed on the crops are also by implication, his subjects. So this cultural ideological position creates a power structure that places his people under his control, not just religiously but also politically and economically. The political power structure then becomes the situation of the powerful versus the powerless. Taken-for-granted ideological positions are veritable instruments for power abuse.

The power contest in the novel between Ezeulu and an unidentified opponent becomes dramatic when he charges at his opponent using the dialogic mode. He would not allow himself to become so debased that someone will dare his powers over the people. The mere thought of someone daring his power is sufficient enough for him to be 'stung to anger'. He treats this unwelcome whisper from his enemy as a face threatening act (FTA) that must be denounced accordingly. He combats this dramatically in the extract below:

**Extract 2.**

'Take away that word *dare*,' he replied to this enemy. 'Yes I say take it away. No man in all Umuaro can stand up and say that I dare not. The woman who will bear the man who will say it has not been born yet (3).

The illocutionary force instantiated with 'Take away that word *dare*' is potent enough to order his enemy to withdraw what he considers a threat to his powers over the people. He performs what Mey calls pragmatic act of ordering with this clause. The deployment of certain lexical items in the extract when critically untied yields interesting insights into Ezeulu's take on the power structure

between him and his people. As far as he is concerned, no one in Umuaro could apply the word *dare* to him. He couldn't imagine someone telling the Chief Priest of Ulu not to *dare*. Following the social power structure within his society, a social inferior would not tell a social superior not to dare. It is an aberration. So the mere thought of an enemy saying that must be resisted as it constitutes a breach of the code of ethics which he relies on to perpetuate his dominance over the people. If this breach is handled with levity, then his hold on power will become threatened. Therefore, he must quickly resist this overbearing onslaught on his trado-religious authority. The power he wields over the people is legitimised within the fabrics of the trado-religious practices of the clan in such a manner that it becomes natural for him to deploy it. So it is considered sacrilegious for anyone to challenge it. He is surely leveraging on this cultural understanding for submitting that no one could challenge his authority in the whole of his community. With his daring declaration in the extract above, he is surely exploiting to its very limit the authority vested in him within the confines of the cultural order.

To demonstrate that the power structure which Ezeulu reflects in his discursive practices is already deeply seated in his mind, even as Ezeulu supplicates before his god, Ulu, he drops and reinforces the traditional ideology of male child superiority over the female child and projects himself first before the people he is supposed to be representing. This is reflected in Extract 3 below:

**Extract 3**

Ulu, I thank you for making me see another new moon. May I see it again and again. This household may it be healthy and prosperous. As this is the moon of planting may the six villages plant with profit. May we escape danger in the farm – the bite of a snake or the sting of the scorpion, the mighty one of the scrubland. May we not cut our shinbone with the machet or the hoe. And let our wives bear male children.... (6)

The contents of the supplication above are quite revealing in many ways as it contains the Chief Priest's idea of the structure of his society, that is, the hierarchy that he projects from his discursive practices above. First, Ezeulu thanks the god, Ulu for permitting him to be alive to see the new moon. This pegs him on the highest rung of the ladder, closest to his god. It is not accidental that he doesn't thank the god for the people first; rather, he chooses to thank him for himself, instead of the people that have made him their representative. If he represents his people, then it is only expected that he presents his people first before himself. This reordering is deliberate since he has already hinted that he could not be challenged by his people. Secondly, from the discursive line of his supplication, his household comes second after himself. The game, obviously, is about himself and his household. This means that his household comes second on the rung of the power structure that is entrenched in his mind. After supplicating for his household, he then cues in the people that he represents. This places them third on the rung of the social ladder that he plots discursively.

Interestingly, even before the god of the land, Ezeulu deploras, from MR, the naturalised belief that the male child is superior to the female which is subconsciously registered in him to ideological reflect the power structure in his society. He discursively projects his society as one that operates a power structure that sees male children as superior to female children. As far as he is concerned, prayer for female children is something that is not worth presenting to the god of the land. He is completely silent on the need for female children in his community. He projects a patriarchal system that vests enormous power in the male child at the expense of the female child, such that they are the ones to be requested for from their god. His projection of male child superiority over the female child is an implicit strategy that is mainly open to those who share

MR with him. His projection of this ideological working of language is anchored on his knowledge of his MR.

Within the context of the struggle over the disputed land between Umuaro and Okperi, the stage is hijacked for ideological power contestation and struggle between Ezeulu and Nwaka. Nwaka sees this front as the long awaited opportunity to unmask the unlimited powers of Ezeulu over Umuaro. Ezeulu deploys his trado-religious power over his people as the Chief Priest of Ulu through the ideological import of what his father had told him. He states this in Extract 4 below:

**Extract 4**

'I know,' he told them, 'my father said this to me that when our village first came here to live the land belonged to Okperi. It was Okperi who gave us a piece of their land to live in. they also gave us their deities – their Udo and their Ogwugwu. But they said to our ancestors – mark my words – the people of Okperi said to our fathers: We give you our Udo and our Ogwugwu; but you must call the deity we give you not Udo but the son of Udo, and not Ogwugwu but the son of Ogwugwu. This is the story as I heard it from my father. If you choose to fight a man for a piece of farmland that belongs to him I shall have no hand in it.'

The ideological underlining of 'my father said this to me...', which of course is drawn from MR, is deployed to hoodwink the community into accepting the validity of his arguments. Ezeulu tries to invoke the ancestral trust and acceptance reposed in his father by the community to establish himself as a formidable Chief Priest of the god of the land. Obviously, what he seeks is the acceptability and validity of his opinion. His manner of speaking is such that aims to be conclusive. He presents his turn at talk with a tacit attempt to be the last to speak on the matter. He invokes infallible historical facts which are logically presented to drum home his point. This strategy is deployed by the speaker to show the supremacy of his arguments over that of others. He seeks to operate beyond

contestation. Ezeulu deploys what his father told him ideologically to instantiate power, that is, the superiority of his thoughts and interventions over those of others.

However, this was not to be as Ezeulu's sought supremacy is vehemently contested by Nwaka. Within the lines of his arguments, he also deploys the discourse strategy of utilising what his father had told him to advance a superior argument over that of Ezeulu. The stage then is set for power struggle between these respected personalities in the community. This site of power struggle between the duo is the most profound in the dimension of power struggle within the Umuaro community. The site became that of power struggle between one of the highest ranked titled personalities in the community, Nwaka 'one of the lords of the land' and the Chief Priest of the community. In a combatant manner, Nwaka confronts Ezeulu in the lines of Extract 5 below:

**Extract 5**

... '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 father 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.' ... 'My father told me a different story. He told me that Okperi people were wonderers...

With the expression 'wisdom is like a goatskin bag; every man carries his own', the above speaker attacks the wisdom in the words of the revered Chief Priest of Ulu. He deploys the witty saying to ideologically contest the wisdom contained in the advice offered the community by Ezeulu. The point he tries to make is that Ezeulu

alone should not be seen as the only custodian of wisdom in the land. To make this point, the text producer exploits the shared traditional knowledge (STK) contained in the proverb to invalidate the wisdom of Ezeulu's speech.

He contests his knowledge of the land by making it clear to him that he has no monopoly of it. What he suggests is that Ezeulu's knowledge of the land is in no way superior to that of others; therefore, it should not determine how the community reacts to a threat posed by Okperi. Nwaka's contention is that Ezeulu is trying to usurp the socio-political space which should be reserved for the lords of the land like himself. He makes it clear that 'If Ezeulu had spoken about the great deity of Umuaro which he carries and which his father carried before him I would have paid attention to his voice.' He suggests with this expression that the Chief Priest tries to operate outside the context of his trado-religious powers. The trado-religious space is his space, so he should stick to that. He draws on shared cultural knowledge (SCK), 'my father told me... to invalidate what Ezeulu's father had told him about the dispute with Okperi. He attempts to structure superior power with his arguments.

The power struggle between the duo is heightened when Ezeulu becomes pointed in his rhetoric. In Extract 6 below, he says:

**Extract 6**

Some people are still talking of carrying war to Okperi. Do they think that Ulu will fight in blame? Today the world is spoilt and there is no longer head or tail in anything that is done. But Ulu is not spoilt with it...

Seeing clearly that his power is being challenged, Ezeulu drops a bombshell for his challenger. From the lines above, he paints a scenic picture of the powers of Ulu over the community; such that if Ulu will not go to war with the people, they dare not go. A critical reading of '... there is no longer head or tail in anything that is done' reveals that he is aware that his challengers are struggling

over power with him. His headship position is what is being threatened. He implicates from the above that he is unruffled since the mantle of power rests with him. But Nwaka is set to stage the supremacy of the socio-political power at his disposal in order to confine Ezeulu's power domain strictly to the religious domain. He mobilises people of like mind and states his contention in Extract 7 below:

**Extract 7**

'My father did not tell me that before Umuaro went to war it took leave from the priest of Ulu,' he said. '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. We have no quarrel with Ulu...

From the first line of the extract above, the speaker contends with the idea of depending on the judgment of Ezeulu before the community could go to war with Okperi. He could not just accept that Ezeulu who controls the religious space will also be allowed to exercise control over the political space. His attitude to this suggests that he sees him as an unacceptable usurper that must be resisted. He rides on the relevance of the MR, that is, the knowledge handed to him by his father, to project its ideological superiority over what Ezeulu's father had told him. What he projects is the superiority of what he was told about the community by his father over and above what was handed over to his contender by his father. He implies that his father is a superior possessor of the history of the community than Ezeulu's father. He tries to push forward his superior ideology in order to win the heart of his people.

The forces that threaten Ezeulu's power over his people are not just internal. There is an external dimension to it. His powers are

threatened within and without. As he struggles to contain the internal contentions, a greater force of contention mounts from the white colonialists who come to take over the land. In the context of his incarceration by the agents of Western colonial powers, the new power structure between him and the agents of imperialism is discursively instantiated. The preface to this is that he is summoned to appear before Mr Clark after waiting for four days to secure audience with him. As he stands before him, the exchange in Extract 8 below ensued:

**Extract 8**

‘Your name is Ezeulu? Asked the interpreter after the white man had spoken. This repeated insult was nearly too much for Ezeulu but he managed to keep calm. ‘Did you not hear me? The white man wants to know if your name is Ezeulu.’ ‘Tell the white man to go and ask his father and his mother their names.’ ... ‘Tell him,’ said Ezeulu, ‘that I am still waiting to hear his message.’ But this was not interpreted. The white man waved his hand angrily and raised his voice. Ezeulu did not need to be told that the white man said he did not want to be interrupted again... ‘Well, are you accepting the offer or not?’... Tell the white man that Ezeulu will not be anybody’s chief, except Ulu.’ ‘What!’ shouted Clarke. ‘Is the fellow mad?’ ... ‘In that case he goes back to prison.’ Clark was now really angry. What cheek! A witch-doctor making a fool of the British Administration in public!

The disdainful treatment meted to Ezeulu above has its background in what Captain Winterbottom had told Mr Clark earlier. He had told him in Extract 9 below that:

**Extract 9**

‘One thing you must remember in dealing with natives is that like children they are great liars. They don’t lie simply to get out of trouble. Sometimes they would spoil a good case by a pointless lie.

The advance warning above is deployed by Mr Clarke as an ideological anchor point to depict his role relationship with the black characters in the novel. So the psychological concept of the blacks that is instilled into him is that of subjects that must be treated like children. He operates from the vantage point of a superior white versus an inferior black. Armed with the stereotype above, he treats the revered Chief Priest of Ulu with disdain.

Ezeulu could not understand why a mortal will treat the Chief Priest of Ulu with such level of disdain. With his idea of his superiority over all humans (half spirit and half human), he fires back at one who is trying to desecrate the traditional order. His reaction is 'Tell the white man to go and ask his father and his mother their names.' This reaction is borne out of the fact that he least expected that a man born of a woman could treat him in that manner.

### **Conclusion**

This critical pragmatic consideration of the dynamics of power struggle in Achebe's *Arrow of God* has revealed that the power struggles in the novel are discursively instantiated. The enormoustrado-religious powers conferred on Ezeulu are threatened from within and without. As he struggles to contain the internal dynamics of the power struggle, he is overwhelmed by the sweeping force of British imperialism. Although he tries to adjust to the realities of the enormity of the powers of the imperialists, he is not quick enough to adjust to this stark reality.

Ezeulu's definition of his enormous power over the people is so deep-seated that its collapse becomes so dramatic. As it is shaken from within, the greater force from without pulls it down. A very striking feature of his discursive practice is the mobilisation of the orally transmitted history of his community as narrated to him by his father. The same is deployed against him by his most profound

internal challenger. This discourse strategy is deployed ideologically to instantiate power by those who use it.

Proverbs are also mobilised in the novel to ideologically structure power. Since proverbs are ideological in nature, this resource is utilised by characters that belong to the traditional order in the novel. Because this resource is a handy component of the community's MR, its deployment is usually considered as a seal that ends disputations since it is considered as infallible wisdom from the ancients. Since the society that is represented in the novel is one that places high premium on the infallibility of the wisdom of the elders, it is deployed by characters to resolve or silence all arguments in any dispute. What users often leverage on is the ideological properties of proverbs, especially within traditional settings.

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