

JEGOCENTRIC LEADERSHIP: REAWAKENING AFRICAN MORAL CONSCIOUSNESS USING ACHEBE'S *ARROW OF GOD*

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Abstract

*To reduce the high level of poverty, insecurity and moral decadence in African society, African leaders need to hold tight to the African moral standard that helps to make critical decision and the people's needs, a priority. This moral standard is the aspect of leadership that will enhance the socioeconomic growth of Africa and hinder the manipulative neo-colonial ideologies from getting a full grip of Africa's socio-cultural consciousness that prioritizes the community over self. Some of the neocolonial ideas present themselves in the form of selfishness, materialism and a quest for superiority. The two main characters in Achebe's *Arrow of God*; Ezeulu and Nwaka, were leaders who allowed their egocentric nature to take upper hand in their decisions and actions which resulted into various crises and socioeconomic backwardness. The text therefore, uses the psychological concept of egoism to analyze the extent of damage caused by egocentric leadership in the text of our study and how it relates to the plight of the present day African*

society and through that call for the reawakening of the African moral consciousness in the leaders.

Keywords: Egoism, Altruism, Moral consciousness, Leadership

Introduction

The problem of egocentric leadership poses a great challenge to Africa whose leaders flaunt personal interest and satisfaction over people oriented leadership, which promotes under development, insurgencies, religious crises and tribal wars. While trying to evaluate African leaders, a US senate committee states in a paper entitled “Democracy in Africa: The New Generation of African Leaders” that:

Casting ballots alone, however, does not a democracy make. Many of Africa's leaders have subverted the process of reform to maintain their own hold on power. These leaders question the feasibility of African democracy and then set about proving their own predictions by inciting inter-ethnic violence, silencing the press, or robbing their countries.

The key statements in the quotation above are: ‘to maintain their own hold on power’, ‘question the feasibility of African democracy’, ‘incite inter-ethnic violence’, ‘silence the press’ and ‘rob their country’. It is disheartening to note that the striking statements used above are true of some African leaders, this is what encourages the west to believe that Africa cannot

rule herself. The question therefore is; what goal do these leaders intend to achieve by trying to prove their own prediction? Achebe emphasizes that one of the trouble with Nigeria is the poverty of thought of her leaders starting from Dr Azikiwe and Chief Awolowo whose biographies exhibited the pledged “to utilize my earned income to secure my enjoyment of a high standard of living” and “... to make all the money that is possible with my brains and brawns to make in Nigeria” respectively. To Achebe, “Thoughts such as this is more likely to produce aggressive millionaires than selfless leaders” (Achebe *The Trouble with Nigeria* 11-12). Due to egocentric leadership, Africa has remained at the background; known by her economic, social and political underdevelopment. Reawakening African moral consciousness is therefore a way to tell the African leader to prioritise the people’s needs and be critical in decision making. Note that, the moral consciousness to be valued here is based on the leadership that is people oriented and one that critically evaluates decisions for the peoples benefit.

The Concept of Ego in Psychoanalysis:

According to Hubbs and Blanks, The word Ego is a Latin word meaning ‘I’ and the Theory of Ego was first coined by Sigmund Freud. They emphasise that:

Freud based the theory on the idea that humans have a Biological unconscious drive_called ‘Id’ which if not placed in check could be very amoral and predatory. The ‘id’ does only what the “I” likes without restriction, the attempt to

restrain the Id becomes the conscious state which also attempts to define the reality of a situation. The attempt to define the real state of a situation gives rise to Ego. Ego, therefore, is the battle ground of personality in that it operates on reality principle, testing, exploring and measuring the world's reaction to certain behaviour. (54)

The implication of the statement above, is that everything that improves the comfort and general well being of 'self' is acceptable, it is the psychological doctrine which holds that individuals are always motivated by self and that it is rational to act in one's self interest. Walker emphasises that genuine altruistic actions are actions done for the sake of others rather than oneself – and it is impossible for human beings (IV-VI). Looking critically at the theory of egoism, one will see that the entire world revolves around self; for instance, people who help the poor do not help them selflessly but to satisfy their sense of responsibility or to show off their patriotism. However, when one allows self to take upper hand in ones actions and decision, one is said to be egoistic. There are three types of psychological Egoism; Desire satisfaction Psychological Egoism which is a kind act out of self interest. As the name implies, its target is to satisfy the desire of a person. Welfare Psychological Egoism is a kind act that is targeted at increasing one's own welfare. This type is often implausible. Lastly, the Hedonistic Psychological Egoism, which acts because of the pleasure of performing such act. These three types of egoism will be used in the analysis of the two leaders in the text of our study in order to express how their egocentric life style affected their community. To be

egocentric is to have a high opinion of oneself and a belief that others should have the same opinion. It is synonymous to being egotistical, which is to be full of one's self, completely self-absorbed and to have an inflated view of one's self-importance (Vocabulary.Com). It states further that being egocentric is to be very self absorbed and being selfish about other people's welfare.

The text of the study *Arrow of God* is the third novel of Chinua Achebe the great African writer that is written in 1964. According to (Jordan 587), *Arrow of God* was coined from an Igbo proverb in which a person or sometimes an event is said to represent the will of God. It is seen in the book that Ezeulu (A chief priest of Ulu), who in the bid to show off the power of his god, often finds himself in constant conflict with other characters such as Nwaka and Ezeidemili who were also leaders in their various capacities, Eustace asserts in a review that:

Arrow of God is essentially a novel of conflict. There is conflict between traditional authority and the white administration; there is the conflict between Umuro and Okperi, there are minor jealousies and rivalries among Ezeulu's wives and son. And there is even a conflict within Ezeulu himself; between his own inclinations and the will of his god, essentially a debate about the limitation of his power; but above all there is the conflict within traditional society in the struggle for power between Ezeulu the chief priest of Ulu

and his opponents, and the rivalry between his deity and theirs... Ezeulu himself is at the centre of all the various conflicts. (85)

This indicates that the society described in *Arrow of God* is a battle ground for leaders and various authorities. Note that according to Merriam-Webster Dictionary, conflict is “a mental struggle resulting from incompatible or opposing needs drives, wishes or external or internal demand, and therefore cannot happen without a hurting feeling to one’s self respect, wishes or demands”. This indicates that conflict cannot exist when the one does not feel hurt or underrated. We shall therefore analyse egocentric leadership using the two characters of our study; Ezeulu and Nwaka.

The name Ezeulu means “The King of Ulu” which in Igbo land signifies the chief priest or the eyes of the god ‘ulu’. Ordinarily, a man in such a lofty position is honoured. According to (Emenyeonu 91), “He is portrayed as a half-man and half spirit and as having more insight than ordinary beings. This is an evident [sic] in the fact that things are revealed to him in dreams and through visions”. He forgets that anyone who is really interested in serving his people must first put his pride in check. The Bible expresses that a leader should be one who serves his people “...but whoever would be great among you must be your slave” (*Revised Standard Version* Matthew 20:26). This is in contrast to Ezeulu’s character because he is egocentric with evident pride. The first striking evidence of self in the character of Ezeulu is from his innermost thought when he wondered about how real his power is. Achebe states that

“whenever Ezeulu considered the immensity of his power over the year and the crops and therefore, over the people he wonders if it was real” (3). He is so overwhelmed by his power but does not understand why people and even his own thought should dispute the claim. While expressing Ezeulu's thought, Achebe in *Arrow of God* states further that:

It was true he names the day for the feast of 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! The 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. But could he refuse? No chief priest had ever refused it; no it could not be done. He would not dare. (3)

Being a ‘watchman’, and not a ‘Lord’ is a hurting truth and almost an impossible task for most African political and religious leaders, who wishes to be worshiped rather than to be praised and honoured for their good works. Ezeulu allows his desire satisfaction psychological Egoism, to make him believe that no one should ever dare him and being an egomaniac, Ezeulu unmasks his over arching need for self assertion. This is exemplified when the decision to send emissary to Okperi (with

white clay for peace or new palm frond for war) was taken, he felt disrespected that his people did not take to his line of argument which states that the people of Okperi were the owners of the land in dispute and so the people of Umuaro should not go to war, a war he calls “war of blame”. At the end of his speech, he sat down expecting his people to accept his advice but was disappointed when his people agrees to take the side with his antagonist, Nwaka. Achebe records that Ezeulu reacted spontaneously; “Ezeulu who had taken in everything with a sad smile, sprang to his feet like one stung in the buttocks by a black ant... ‘When an adult is in the house, the she-goat is not left to suffer the pains of parturition on its tether. This is what our ancestors have said. But what have we seen here today?’”(18).The simile “like one being stung in the buttocks by a black ant” denotes a speedy reaction that is clouded in severe anger and disagreement. He accuses the elders who did not speak in his favour, of neglecting their duty and are afraid to be called cowards. Ezeulu’s reaction above is an absolute display of self. The way and manner in which he presented his point showed that his interest is not for the sake of his community but because he sees himself as ‘he who must be obeyed’. Although his advice is genuine, but his approach to its rejection is clouded by a quest for self assertion and this is because he takes it too personal. Should it be stated then that Ezeulu is not being patriotic by giving the correct advice? No, not so, for in a democratic setting as seen in the meeting, one must not take it personal when one’s words are not accepted. Our politicians and political parties should therefore not take it personal when decisions are not taken in their favour. This is

because the resultant effect of their anger will not encourage the Africa's peace, socio-economic growth and stability.

In another instance, Ezeulu is according to Baumrid, an authoritarian parent who guides and rules his household with so much authority that communication flows mostly from one way; from himself to his household. The implication is that he allows little or no negotiation between himself and any member of his family while he expects so much from them. He gives little or no nurturing, and does not give out much in return nor places his feet on the shoes of the others to feel their pain (6). This is just like most African countries today, where the leaders have made themselves mini gods among their people thereby hindering growth and economic stability that could have come from other people's idea. To express this, Achebe further records through Edeogo's thought when he recalled what his mother said about his father:

He remembered what his mother used to say when she was alive, that Ezeulu's only fault was that he expects everyone – his wives, his kinsmen, his children, his friends and even his enemies – to think and act like himself. Anyone who dared to say no to him was an enemy. He forgot the saying of the elders that if a man sought for a companion who acted entirely like himself he would live in solitude (92).

This shows that Ezeulu's egocentric leadership style demands for people who behaves just like him or people who must follow every one of his dictates. Of course no society grows

under such leadership. People must be given the opportunity to express their different ideas, for one tree cannot make a forest.

The next instance is in Ezeulu's discussion with his wife;

I don't know how many times I have said
in this house that I shall not eat my supper
when every other man in Umuaro is
retiring to sleep ... But you will not listen.

I went all the way to Nwangene to fetch
water and

If you like you may go to Nkisa. What I
am saying is that if you want that madness of
yours to be cured, bring my supper at this
time another day. (Achebe 9)

.Ezeulu does not want to consider all the effort made by his wife in order to prepare his meal. This is a proof that anything whatsoever, words and behaviour that does not please Ezeulu is not acceptable. As an egocentric leader, Ezeulu desires to control the people around him like robots for two good heads are better than one. On the other hand, African leaders are not encouraged to accept mediocrity or to tolerate any form of laziness, but they should understand that an unheeded cry for help from the people like that of Ezeulu's wife above, is very hurting and sometimes bounces back against the leaders. An Igbo adage says that 'the ear that refuses to heed to advice is cut off with the head when it is beheaded', this implies that just as

Ezeulu suffers a heart break at the defection of his people to Christian religion so will the leader who refuses to listen to the heart beats of his people suffer the pain with them when the cheeps are down. Desire satisfaction egoism in addition to the immunity bestowed on some leaders today, has therefore been the root cause of the authoritarian democratic leadership styles seen in some African countries today and these cannot encourage economic growth.

Moving further into Ezeulu's character, one will also understand that he has a high exaggeration of himself consequently, he finds it had to forgive and vows to revenges every hurt. An instance is in his desire to avenge himself of Umuaro's neglect of him as the very important priest while he was in detention at Okperi. Ian McKee, states that "People who are vengeful tend to be those who are motivated by power, by authority and by the desire for status" (qtd in Price 34). However his desire to revenge will not became known until it will be time to name the date for the New Yam Festival, then he will make Umuaro taste the power of his priesthood. .Ezeulu plays out his vengeance so neatly that it takes the elders of Umuaro a long time to understand that it is mere revenge from Ezeulu and not Ulu's punishment. In one of the visits by the ten elders, to plead with him to name the date for the festival, he responds in an unperturbed manner. "I welcome you all. Your mission is a good one and I thank you... I need not speak in riddles you all know what our custom is. I only call a new festival when there is only one yam left from the last. Today I have three so I know that the time has not come" (206,207). Ezeulu hid his anger in the guise of being led by Ulu and proves

adamant even when the elders asked him to eat the yam by refusing to show empathy for his people's hunger. The result is hunger, death and mass defection to the western religion. This indicates that egocentric leaders can lie to their people or conceal some important truth from them in order to satisfy their selfish interest, which places the people at the mercy of their lies. Finally the necessary things that needs to be done if the truth is told will be left undone, more lies will be told the original lies and thus corruption will be on the increase.

Furthermore, egoistic leadership brings competitions and above the law kind of attitude. Ezeulu will not bend to any rule that affects his personality. His desire psychological egoism made him not to apologize, when his son Oduche, locked up the sacred python in a box, Ezeulu refuses to admit publicly that a member of his household has desecrated Idemili rather he said, "Go back and tell Ezidemili to eat shit. Do you hear me? Tell Ezidemili that Ezeulu says he should go and fill this mouth with shit ..." (54). Thus he allows his quest for self satisfaction to take the greater path of him. Even his god Ulu attested to this when he rebuked him saying;

Ta nwanu! Barked Ulu in his ear, as a spirit would in the ear of an impertinent human child. 'Who told you that this was your own fight...?' I say who told you that this was your own fight you could arrange the way it suits you?... beware you do not come between me and my victim or you may receive blows not meant for you! Do you not

know what happens when two Elephants fight?
(191-92).

Though, according to Emenyonu, scholars argued that it may not have been Ulu's voice that he: Ezeulu heard, but an imagination subject to hallucination. However, he did agree that if that was Ulu's voice, "then 'it is far from suggestion' that Ezeulu's past conduct has been justifiable" (89). As the saying goes, "pride goes before a fall", the joy of seeing a bad thing happen to a wicked leader, his misfortune did not attract any sympathy from his people.

Nwaka on the other hand involves himself in hedonistic psychological egoism, which according to Walker in "The Philosophy of Egoism" is doing something for the pleasure of the action and this is driven by his dependent on his material wealth. Nwaka is said to have to come from a long line of prosperous men and from a village that called itself first in Umuaro who believes that the six villages came together to offer the priesthood to the weakest among them to ensure that no one in alliance became too powerful. This is why he looks down on others and never comes to term with Ezeulu's audacious nature. Nwaka having taken the highest title in the land 'Eru', which was called after the lord of wealth himself fearlessly, rises to speak after the priest of Ulu had spoken. To dare is to be courageous but sometimes it could lead to being fool hardy, which is daring without a proper judgment. Nwaka's attitude is encouraged by Ezeidemili. Therefore, in the bid to humiliate Ezeulu; set his childhood friend Nwaka, to challenge the priest of Ulu. Achebe submits that; "Nwaka's

drummer and praise singer was none other than the priest of Idemili, the personal deity of Umunneora. This man Ezeidemili was Nwaka's friend and mentor, it was he who fortified Nwaka and sent him forward"(40). Ezeidemili is therefore the 'godfather' object seen in some African leadership circle today. Story has it that some sitting leaders must have to 'settle' these godfathers if they must have a smooth rule. (Obey 28) exemplified this with the case of Chris Uba (godfather) who fought for the removal of Dr Christ Ngige (godson) for his refusal to play to the rule of the game as arranged and that caused looting of public funds, bloodshed and gubernatorial abduction. (Obey quoted in Uyi 180)

While exploring the activities of egocentric leadership in the text, it is observed that in order to discredit the words of Ezeulu: without taking time to think critically about the implication of his statements, Nwaka, encourages his people to make the choice of sending emissary with peace or war message and being a prestigious man, he arouses the young men to agree to visit the people of Okperi. Seeing how battle ready the young men were, the oldest man in the gathering sounds a note of warning to the community, which fell on deaf ears because the encouragement given to the young men by Nwaka has already taken over their senses of reasoning. Nwaka's actions and words shows that he enjoys seeing the people of Umuaro discredit Ezeulu in other to do his biddings even if it is to the detriment of their lives. Gumede in his 'Leadership for Africa's Development' expresses that 'Africa has many civil wars that are avoidable. There is a big problem of peace and a large problem of conflict in African continent. It

is hard to develop a society in such conditions” (77). Consequently, the reactions of the two honourable men- Ezeulu and Nwaka, cause a big psychological noise that precedes a wrong decision. The adage that states that when two elephants fight, the grasses in the ground suffer comes into play as the ego lead decision of Nwaka, causes the death of some of the youths such as Akukalia. There are many instances today not to be mentioned in this study where some African leaders make decisions that negatively affect the people. These leaders sometimes bring some foreign rules home without putting some structures in place to cushion it. In agreement to this, Gumede states further that “Many countries in African continent are increasingly copying or trying to copy the Chinese social and economic development model. Arguably, replicating the Chinese model would not work in African continent for many reasons chief among them, [sic] the reality that they are different” (77). Leaders, however enforces these rules, which will eventually affect the economic, social and psychological life of the people. They should therefore wake to the moral consciousness of people’s oriented leadership that makes critical decisions in other not to turn Africa into an object for economic and scientific experiment by other people oriented leaders from the west.

Note that like in the *Arrow of God*, most African leaders, engage the youths in all manner of dirty jobs such as ritual murder, kidnapping and restless protest, in the bid to beat their political opponents which results into loss of lives. However, some of them who survive it are permanently maimed physically while the rest are given some elevated position and

the circle continues. This indicates that egocentric leaders tend to forget that they are in that position by the people's mandate but due to their opposing need drive, have done more harm than good to the society they lead. This evil presents itself in the form of increase in corruption, the quest to go abroad and various protests such as the most recent "End SARS" protest in Nigeria, insurgencies, religious crises and even increase in human trafficking,

Conclusion

From the analysis above, leaders egoistic attitude usually produce pride, vengefulness, competitiveness, above the law kind of attitude, authoritativeness, high exaggeration of themselves, and irrational decisions. Egocentric leadership style cannot encourage any form of positive growth and greatness to the community; rather it causes various forms of conflict, deaths, hunger and due to the quest for a relief, encourages a mass defection to the western lifestyles and lands. Leaders in Africa should therefore wake to the African moral consciousness that is void of overriding influence of self, which may cause suffering and pain to the people around them and pick up our cultural and socio-cultural heritage of communal leadership, which considers other people's interest and prioritises the communal values.

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