

An Appraisal of Socio-political Conditions in Africa: Perspectives from Chukwuezi's "Chukwu Ndi Isiojii"

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Abstract: Socio-political decadence arising from bad leadership and corruption is a recurrent motif in African literature. However, the reaction of citizens to their sad social realities is as important as measures used in addressing them. While quite a number of scholars have addressed the issue of bad leadership in literature in English, not much research have been done in this direction among scholars in the Igbo medium. Many Igbo writers, in the Igbo language medium have written on culture and cultural conflict, the ecosystem, African ideologies and philosophies, but inadequate attention has been paid to socio-economic and political conditions in the context of Africa. Consequently, the present study examines a poet's evaluation and reaction to the shambolic social and political order in Africa. This is with a view to examining the attitudes of the citizens to their plight and charting a way forward. Anelechi Chukwuezi's poem titled "Chukwu ndi isi ojii" was purposively selected from *Utara Nti*, an anthology of Igbo poems edited by Nolue Emenanjo. The result shows that Africans blame the gods for their socio-political challenges; as they believe the gods are emasculated because they could not stop the spate of colonialism, whereby Europeans intruded into Africa and exploited her by carrying away their resources to Europe. They also blamed the gods for the present comatose situation in Africa where evil has become the new social order. While defending the gods of Africa, the Poet chides the skeptics by drawing their attention away from the gods to themselves as the cause of their problems. The analysis shows that rather than make efforts and requisite sacrifices to stem the tide of evil and outcomes of bad governance in their land, Africans are wasting their time expecting divine intervention. This study concludes that, until Africans take their destiny in their hands and fight their battles, the present harsh socio-political and economic realities will persist.

Keywords: Igbo literature, bad leadership, corruption, the gods, Chukwu ndiisiojii

Résumé : La décadence socio-politique engendrée par la mauvaise gouvernance et la corruption est un thème récurrent de la littérature africaine. Cependant, la réaction des citoyens face à leurs tristes réalités sociales est tout aussi importante que les mesures prises pour y remédier. Si de nombreux chercheurs se sont penchés sur la question de la mauvaise gouvernance dans la littérature anglophone, peu d'études ont été menées sur ce sujet par les auteurs de langue igbo. Nombre d'écrivains igbo ont écrit, dans leur langue maternelle, sur la culture et les conflits culturels, l'écosystème, les idéologies et philosophies africaines, mais les conditions socio-économiques et politiques en Afrique ont été insuffisamment étudiées. Par conséquent, la présente étude examine l'analyse et la réaction d'un poète face au chaos social et politique qui règnent en Afrique. L'objectif est d'étudier les attitudes des citoyens face à leur situation et de proposer des pistes de réflexion pour l'avenir. Le poème d'Anelechi Chukwuezi, intitulé « Chukwu Ndi Isiojii », a

été choisi délibérément parmi *Utara Ntji*, une anthologie de poèmes igbo éditée par Nolu Emenanjo. Il en ressort que les Africains imputent leurs difficultés socio-politiques aux dieux, les jugeant impuissants face à la vague de colonialisme. Les Européens ont alors envahi l'Afrique et exploité le continent en important ses ressources vers l'Europe. Ils les tiennent également responsables de la situation actuelle en Afrique, où le mal est devenu la norme. Tout en défendant les dieux africains, le poète interpelle les sceptiques, les incitant à se remettre en question et à se considérer eux-mêmes comme la cause de leurs problèmes. L'analyse révèle qu'au lieu de déployer les efforts et les sacrifices nécessaires pour endiguer le mal et les conséquences de la mauvaise gouvernance sur leurs terres, les Africains perdent leur temps à attendre une intervention divine. Cette étude conclut que, tant que les Africains ne prendront pas leur destin en main et ne mèneront pas leurs propres combats, les dures réalités socio-politiques et économiques actuelles persisteront.

Mots-clés : littérature igbo, mauvaise gouvernance, corruption, dieux, Chukwu Ndi Isiojii

Introduction

Literature is a reflection of the life of a community, encompassing their politics, morals, religion and culture of a society. It is essentially used to mirror the way of life of a society, for the purpose of exposing evil, criticizing characters, changing a narrative, projecting cultural values, ideology and world view, and generally narrating the concerns of a society. Consequently, writers use one form of literary genre or another as a tool to criticize the social and political situations prevalent in their society. According to Duhan (2015) literature is a corrective agent used to mirror the society in two major ways; first, in relation to making society realize its mistakes and making necessary corrections. Secondly, it aims at projecting values and virtues for people to copy, all for the good of society. As a product of its society, the writer is in a good position to respond to the events and situations in their entity, in relation to their social life, their culture, their politics, and their general way of life. In doing this, the writer is concerned with shaping or reshaping the minds of the people in their society. Aside being a natural critic, the writer is chiefly an observer of life; far from being a neutral observer or one who is aloof from the happenings in their domain, the writer watches and reacts by penning down their feelings and views, all aimed at developing and reforming society. Thus, the writer can be said to be a vocal and active participant in the affairs of their society.

Writers in Africa are saddled with multidimensional challenges; from colonialism to culture contact and conflict, ethnic/racial identity concerns, political leadership, official corruption, ethnicity, etc. While writers such as Achebe, Ngugi and Soyinka were concerned with the colonial experience while projecting the real Africa to the world, others such as Peter Abrahams, Nadine Gordimer, were concerned with racial discrimination during the Apartheid epoch in South Africa. Underscoring black pride in their effusive writings, the movement garnered adherents such as Birago Diop, Mongo Beti, Ferdinand Oyono, across Franco-phone Africa. Across the mix of African writers were those who focused on the politics of the emergent Africa, fresh from the colonial experience; writers such as Achebe, Ayi Kwei Armah, J. P Clarke, etc. dwelt on corruption by African leaders who, having replaced colonial leadership, turned against their own people by appropriating societal resources for their own private affairs. Thus, writers react to the prevailing conditions in their time and space; incidentally, these reactions have mainly been against

a social order that is not acceptable to the people, hence agitations for change in such areas.

It is notable that the writers mentioned above are mainly writers using the English medium as a tool of expression; among them are those who also used their indigenous languages to advance the same cause, such as Ngugi who wrote in his native Gikuyu language after renouncing English and his first name James, and took on an all native Gikuyu name, Ngugi waThiong'o. There are quite a number of African writers who use only their native languages to write irrespective of genre. Among them are the playwright Ebrahim Hussein, the poet Mathias Mnyampala, the novelists Muhammed Abdulla, Ben Mtobwa, Euphrase Kezilahabi and Shaaban Robert all from Tanzania, who used Swahili. Others are novelist Ken Walibora from Kenya who also wrote in Kiswahili, the novelist Daniel Fagunwa from Nigeria who wrote in Yoruba, etc. Among the Igbo are a plethora of writers who use Igbo as medium in all the genres; among them are the novelists, Tony Ubesie, Inno Nwadike, Bertram Osuagwu, and a coterie of poets such as J. U Nzeako, J. Obienyem, J. Maduekwe, T. Ubesie, etc. The writers, particularly the poets were mainly concerned with features of the natural environment and ecology, Igbo philosophy and culture and the evaluation of the human physique and phenomena. While many writers in the Igbo medium have prioritized culture and Igbo way of life in their writings, some of them are focused on politics and leadership and patterns of life in contemporary society. One of such poets is Anelechi Chukwuezi whose have African leaders made to develop their economies? Consequently, the aim of this study poem "Chukwu ndi isi ojii" will be explored in this study. The focus of this paper is leadership in Africa; the renowned African novelist, Chinua Achebe, in his book *The trouble with Nigeria* (1983) submitted without mincing words that, the problem with Nigeria is leadership. Endowed with immense material human resources, Africa stands a good position to be economically self-sufficient and progressive. But the sad reality is that Africa is backward, and still struggling as a developing, if not under-developed polity, always in need of assistance from former colonies in Europe, as well as international financial institutions. Achebe's worry is that the leaders of Africa have, over the years, failed to use their natural endowments to transform their countries; rather they divert the commonwealth to personal use to the detriment of the masses who largely remain poor and needy. The question posed in this study is, from the perspective of the poet under study, what attempts is to examine how the poet treats the issue of leadership coupled with socio-political disequilibrium in Africa and the consequences to the society.

1. Studies on Corruption among African Leaders

One of the most prevalent issues in African novels particularly after independence is the issue of leadership and the state of the polity in Africa. Many African writers have extensively explored the theme of bad leadership in their novels, evaluating it as the major hurdle that Africa was facing in its political history. Consequently, the seemingly chronic inability of most African countries to overcome bad governance leading to various social problems has inspired a growing body of literature, in every genre, the novel, play and poetry. Onyeashie, Onwumelu and Obi (2010) examine venality as portrayed in two African novels: *The Man of The People* by Achebe and *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* by Ayi Kwei Armah. Set in the post-independent days of Ghana (1957) and Nigeria

(1960) respectively, these novels are both centered on the corrupt practices of the first African political. In these novels, the authors portrayed political issues with great concern as experiences of the African nation, shortly after independence. The themes highlighted by these two novels include poverty, moral bankruptcy, greed, bribery and corruption, as well as gross abuse of power by political leaders. The authors posit that, in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, poverty is reflected in the lives of many characters such as 'the Man', teacher, Amankwa, while corruption was the order of the day as evident in Joseph Koomson who works in the railway corporation, and also worked at the dock as a seaman and from there he enters politics and becomes a minister and on getting into politics, Koomson buys some boats in the name of a proxy and engages in various indecent activities. In *A Man of the People* due, because of their corrupt practices, the government agents are hated with passion by the villagers, and the people still see their new African leaders such as Chief Nanga and Chief Koko as same with the erstwhile colonial masters who oppressed and exploited them. According to the authors, the two novels are one in their conclusion that, ironically, political independence has not translated into the much-desired eldorado and economic renaissance in Africa.

Suleiman (2017) examines the theme of corrupt leadership as portrayed in two of Achebe's novels: *A Man of the People* and *Anthills of the Savannah*. It explores the democratic landscape punctuated by political corruption, greed, oppression, rascality, and inordinate appetite of the ruling class as portrayed in the two novels of Achebe. The author states succinctly that the central theme in these novels is the corruption that has engulfed the political system of Nigeria, affecting virtually every part of the society. The two novels portray a writer's disillusionment and disaffection with the state of affairs in Nigeria and Africa as a whole. Precisely, in *The Man of the People*, irresponsible, hypocritical and half-educated politicians like Nanga exploit the ignorance of the masses to satisfy their private interest and animal desires; Nanga, a privileged minister built for himself three blocks of seven-storey luxury flats at £3,000 each out of public funds. In contrast, well-meaning, educated and perceptive men like Odili become frustrated, embittered and alienated by the activities of politicians such as Nanga, who was democratically elected by their people, but who turned against the people on assuming office. Similarly, "Anthills of the Savannah", is chiefly concerned with the abuse of power; it portrays the nauseating degree of abuse, exploitation, intimidation and oppression of the very society and people to whose service power ought to be deployed. This power abuse is demonstrated in the government of His Excellency, Sam, the protagonist. The "Sun" is used by Achebe to demonstrate this inordinate craving for power as well the desire for self-perpetuation of power over the people, as His Excellency eventually desired to become president for life. His Excellency symbolizes the same person as the Sun, and connotes the rule of violence, tyranny, injustice, and violation of human rights. In the end, the citizens remained largely poor, hungry, deprived, and ever looking forward to a good government.

Eli (2020) examined the theme of corruption in three African novels: Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Devil on the Cross*, Chinua Achebe's *A Man of the People* and Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*. In Ngũgĩ's *Devil on the Cross* corruption is depicted in post-independence Kenya and its crucial consequence on the living condition of the

masses in Kenya. According to Eli, the idea of corruption was evident from the very beginning of the novel. Ngugi connected and aligned the devil with powerful people in Kenyan society whose traits are characterized by devilish acts. The boss Kihara was portrayed in the novel as a devil since he wanted to exploit the protagonist Warĩnga for his own pleasure. This is a part of the manipulation of the masses by politicians whose major interest is making wealth and not service to the people. In *A Man of the People*, Achebe portrays both political corruption and moral corruption; one of the major characters Nanga is depicted as the most corrupt politician in this society of the novel. Rather than serve the people, he deprived and exploited them. The main character Odili struggled against this situation but found out that he could not live without being involved in the entire filth. In *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, the Man is seen as struggling to maintain integrity against the immoral norm in his country. The timber merchant Amankwa comes to the Man's office and offers him a bribe of twenty Ghanaian Cedis to facilitate the transport of his felled logs from his inland concession to the harbour. Although the Man declined the offer, he was later to be told by his wife that he is merely pretending and can never be uninvolved in the decadence that has enveloped the Ghanaian society.

Chinaka (2020) examined some of the archetypal characters in Festus Iyayi's 'The Contract', a fictional text, with those in Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala's *Corruption is Dangerous*, a nonfictional text. According to Odinaka, in Iyayi's 'The Contract', the driving force of corruption revolves around the multi-million-naira Ogbé City Council contract in Benin City by Ogie, Chief Obala's son, contractors in league with other government agents. The story exposes how these agents are intensely desirous to steal Nigeria's resources in vicious ways. Similarly, in Okonjo-Iweala's account of her personal experience with Nigerian corrupt officials, she fought what she called "a small kleptocratic ruling elite". According to Odinaka, the idea derived from the text is suggestive of a country turned into a political sea of corruption teeming with all manner of cold-blooded creatures desperately questing for wealth. Odinaka submits that Okonjo-Iweala's account shares a lot in common with Iyayi's fictional account; both narratives center on the bizarre nature of corruption in Nigeria. Each story aptly describes and expose the negative but frightening consequences of corruption and its implication in the Nigerian society.

Ilori (2021) examines the representation of corrupt political leadership in pre-independence and post-independence Nigeria as represented in Yoruba novels. According to the author, there was a consensus among the novelists that corrupt political leadership is the major obstacle to realizing good governance and democratic stability in Nigeria. Some of the corrupt political leadership motifs depicted in the texts include diversion of public funds as seen in *Şaworoide*, *Ìjàmbá and Àkùkọ*. perversion of justice as seen in *Baba and Orilawè*, bribery and extortion in *Gbóbaníyì*, nepotism, perversion of justice and sit-tight syndrome as seen in *Ìjàmbá and Àkùkọ*, and kick-back, suppression of press freedom, diversion of public funds as depicted in *Ìjàmbá and Àkùkọ*. The author posits that the obvious implications of these vices on the nation are bad governance, abuse of power, mismanagement of public resources, underdevelopment, injustice, emergence of leaders with questionable character, violation of the rule of law, and subversion of standard and merit.

This review of related works has evaluated the analysis of critics of various literary works written by Africans about leadership in Africa. A common thread in all the works is that, as exposed by writers, African countries are mal-administered; the leaders, as well as the citizens are not progressive. Economically and politically, African countries have remained consistently backward, despite the vast economic resources at their disposal. Notably, all the critics are united in positing that the bane of economic growth and development in Africa is bad leadership and corruption. In the present study, the position of an Igbo poet, writing in the Igbo medium will be evaluated, in the background of economic recession in Africa. A major departure from earlier works is the mix of religion in the present study. While in the extant literature, political issues were addressed politically, in the present study, there is a taint of religion or African superstition being factored into socio-political discourse. Additionally, although the poet is Igbo, by ethnicity, he perceives black Africa, south of the Sahara as one political entity. This view is in tandem with the position of Suleiman (2017) that what happens in one black African country is applicable to another. According to him, Kanga (a fictional Nigeria) may be the geo-political context of *Anthills of the Savannah* by Achebe; nevertheless, its politics and problems are applicable to Ghana, Cameroon, Kenya, South Africa, Togo, Uganda and several other African states.

2. Methodology

One Igbo poem in the Igbo language medium was purposively sampled from *Utara Nti* an anthology of modern Igbo verse edited by Nolue Emenanjo. Out of a total of 47 poems in the collection based on variegated topics, social, cultural and political, one poem titled "Chukwu ndiOjii" written by Anelechi Chukwuezi was selected. The poem was selected since it provides a full account of the socio-political challenges facing African countries, as well as the reaction of the people to these challenges. A second reason for the choice of this poem is that its subject matter still resonates in the contemporary period. The reason for choosing a single poem in this study is constraints of space; the nature of analysis (descriptive) may not leave sufficient space for the treatment of another poem. The poems were translated by the author who is a native speaker of Igbo and who is also proficient in the English language.

Although Igbo is an autochthonous group, they have contacted other groups such as the Ibibio, in the east, the Edo in the west, the riverine people in the south and the Igala in the north. Despite these contacts, the Igbo language have remained largely the same, except few cases of borrowing from the Ibibio ethnic stock who have intermingled with Igbo more than other groups (neighbours) mentioned. The only language which influenced the Igbo significantly is English; due to colonialism, the English language became a second language to most Nigerians, including the Igbo, via western education and missionary activities. Incidentally, English and Igbo share the same word order of subject, verb object (SVO) which makes it easier for learn English. This contact with the West has left its mark on the Igbo language in the areas of lexical borrowing; quite a good number of English words have entered Igbo particularly due to lack of equivalent words in Igbo. In the poem under study, the reference to the Patriarchs in the Christian scriptures (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) is a good pointer to such influences.

Analytical Approach

Content analysis was used as a model for analysis of data. As a result, patterns and meanings will be derived from the qualitative data, which in the present case, is a text. The data will be presented in Igbo and translated to English. Thereafter, analysis will involve description of the content followed by a discussion of the findings. The description of each text is relevant to drawing conclusions about content and their relationship to the context and the socio-political space being spotlighted.

3. Analysis and Findings

This is a protest poem by the Poet Anelechi Chukwuezi. The Poet is challenging public opinion or rather the opinion of skeptics that seems to believe that the deplorable social and political conditions in Africa are traceable and attributable to spiritual forces. The skeptics are of the view that such spiritual forces as the gods should be held accountable for colonialism and the underdevelopment of Africa. Against the background of the successful colonization of Africa by European powers, such skeptics believe that, the African God is emasculated for not contending, resisting and repelling the intrusion of western imperialists into Africa, at the time. The idea is that, a strong African God would not have allowed strangers from Europe to rule Africa by force of arms and carry away their rich resources. Furthermore, there is a belief that a strong African God would not oversee a vast territory plagued by underdevelopment and economic backwardness, orchestrated by its own people. In this poem, the Poet stands in defense of the African God; rather than cast aspersions or blames the African God for the exploitation of Africa by Western Imperialists under its watch, and the continued economic retrogression of Africa in contemporary times, the Poet looks within the Black African world for the cause. However, at the onset of the poem, he attempts to provide a background picture of the qualities of the African God:

*Chi kere anyị dị egwu
O nweghi onye ga-agọnarị ya
Chineke anyị dị ebube
Ọ dị ike, na-eji nji pụrụ iche
Ọ na-ahụ ụzọ n'ọchịchiri*

The God that created us is great
No one can deny him
Our God is glorious
He is strong and black in a unique way
He sees in the dark

In the opening lines of this un-stanzared poem, the Poet proudly establishes the power of the African God *Chineke anyị dị ebube, ọ dị ike, na-eji nji pụrụ iche* "Our God is glorious, He is strong, and black in a unique way". Here, the Poet eulogises God as great and powerful, and posits that, the God who created the world *Chineke* is black in colour and therefore African. This idea sharply contrasts with the myth commonly circulated by Western religion and Caucasians that God is white in colour. The concept of the black-

coloured God is used by the Poet to challenge that skewed belief that has never been substantiated by facts, and also to question the rationale for attributing whiteness for a God that created people of different colours, including black Africans. It is understandable that the poem was written few years after the exit of the colonial masters, signifying that certain elements were still livid and seething with white rule and the effects on the mind of the people. Certainly, the vestiges of colonial rule were still prevalent in the society; what with the political and religious systems introduced by the colonial masters and Christian missionaries who worked alongside them. The concept of the Black God is therefore the Poet's attempt to reappraise colonial theology. The Poet is asserting that, it is not the missionaries that introduced Africans to the Supreme Being; rather, Africans had always known Him, hence the Igbo reference to Him as *Chineke* "The God that creates".

In describing the strength of the African God, the Poet submits, *Chi anyị bụ agụ tūrụ agwa, ka Chi ibe ya ndị ọzọ* "Our God is a leopard with spots, greater than other gods". The African God is metaphorically likened to a leopard, to underscore its strength among other animals in the jungle. By likening Him to the king of the forest, the Poet is suggesting that the African God is more powerful than the gods *Chi* of other lands, such as Europe and the Americas, although they were not mentioned. The Igbo believe in the physical strength of the leopard so much that it is advised *Onye akpana nwa agụ aka n'ọdụ ma ọ dị ndụ ma ọ nwurụ anwụ* "Do not touch the tail of a leopard, whether it is alive or dead", suggesting that the beast is strong enough to defy death. Buttressing the fact that the African God is awesome and devours like the leopard, the Poet goes on to suggest that He eats blood

*Ọ na-eri ọbara
Ma ọ bụ nkee Isaac
Ma ọ bụ nkee Jesus
Ma ọ bụ nke atūrụ*

He eats blood
Whether that of Isaac
Whether that of Jesus
Whether that of a ram

Here, the Poet zeroes into the type of sacrifices used to appease the African God. The poet's view is that the African God accepts all sacrifices offered to the gods of other religions, hence its universal orientation and coverage. Stating that He eats blood *ọ na-eri ọbara* implies that the African God accepts blood sacrifices. However, there is no discrimination in the type of blood sacrifice it accepts. For example, *ma ọ bụ nke Isaac* "whether that of Isaac", implies that He is receptive to human sacrifice. In the Bible, it is recorded that God tested Abraham by ordering him to sacrifice his son Isaac to Him. While Abraham obeyed, God intervened at a critical point of making the sacrifice and prevented him from killing Isaac. The intervention demonstrated that God did not accept or encourage human sacrifice; He only wanted to know if Abraham was ready to offer the only son God gave him through his wife Sarah. In the context of this biblical episode, it is

evident that the Poet is claiming that the African God accepts human sacrifice. Next is the sacrifice that God Himself offered, *Ma o bu nke Jesus* “Whether that of Jesus”. Again, according to the Bible, as recorded in the book of John, God gave His only Begotten son Jesus as atonement for the sin of the world. The atonement involves the shedding of Jesus’ blood for the salvation of the world. The Poet posits that the African God is receptive to the blood of the Christ. The implication of this reference is that, in contrast to Isaac who is human, the African God is receptive to the blood of deities such as Jesus. Lastly, the poet refers to the blood of an animal *Ma o bu nke aturu* “Whether that of a ram”. Here, it is possible that the Poet is referring to the ram offered by Muslims during their festive periods, or the sheep offered by native people including Igbo to the earth goddess and other deities. Whichever be the case, the position of the Poet is that the African God can be appeased by all manner of blood, irrespective of faith or religion. He could be appeased by Jews, Christians, Muslims and traditional worshippers; this implies that the African God is liberal, accommodating and receptive to all religious groups in the world. Next, the Poet delves into the sacrifices made to the god as food

*Nri ya puru iche
Ewu e ji a churu ya aja
Ga-agba abuba gbaa ihu
Nwasisi ya ma o bu okeokpa
Ga-achapu ka igwe ocha
Ihe o na-ata bu naanji oji ugo*

His food is unique
The goat used to sacrifice to him
Should be fatty and robust
The chicken or the cock
Should be as white as the clear sky
What he eats is only golden cola nut

In the effort to show that the African God is no mean God, the Poet claims that His foods are not ordinary but the best of animals and crops, *Ewu e ji a churu ya aja ga-agba abuba, gbaa ihu* “The goat used to sacrifice to it must be fat”. In addition to the goat, *Nwasisi ya ma o bu okeokpa ga-achapu ka igwe ocha* “The fowl must be as bright as the clean sky”. These two domestic animals, goat and fowl, are the commonest ones used in making sacrifices to the earth goddess in Igbo culture. However, since the poet asserts that *nri ya puru iche* “His food is unique”, it is obvious that these animals must be the best of the flock, with respect to fatness for the goat and whiteness for the fowl, for them to qualify to be used as sacrifice to the African God. The Poet is claiming that since the African God is the greatest that He deserves the best. In addition, this African god eats the best of cola nut *Ihe o na-ata bu naanji oji ugo* “What he eats is only golden cola nut”. In Igbo culture, oji “cola nut” is used to offer to guests and also used in sacrifices to the gods and deities. However, all cola nut are not the same in status; there are some that are more prestigious than others while there are some that are not even eaten, such as the one lobed cola nut, which is said to be dumb *oji ogbi* “dumb cola nut”. In the cola nut family, there are revered

ones such as the four-lobed cola nut, respected because it represents the four Igbo markets, *Eke, Orié, Afo, Nkwo*, and the seven-lobed cola nut which is revered because it stands for perfection. Out of the lot, the one that stands out is *oji ugo* “golden cola nut”, particularly due to its colour; aside that its colour is golden which makes it look more attractive than other cola nuts, it is not as common as others. The rarity of this species of cola nut is aligned with its cost and value in the society. Hence, the Poet claims that this is the only cola nut deservedly offered the African God, implying that it will not take a lesser cola nut. Furthermore, the Poet ventures into a deeper aspect of the African God to dispel any doubt about his holistic greatness

*Chi anyi bụ ezigbo Chukwu
Kwesiri nsopuru na ofufe
Eziokwu bụ ebe obibi ya
Mmegbu di ya ka isi na-awa ogbenye*

Our God is a good God
That deserves honour and worship
Truth is His dwelling place
Oppression is to him like the poor man's headache

In furtherance of the quest to present a great image of the African God, the Poet takes time to focus on the moral attributes of this God. He is portrayed as *ezigbo Chukwu* “good God”, *eziokwu bu ebe obibi ya* “Truth is its home”, *mmegbu di ya ka isi na-awa ogbenye* “oppression is to Him like the poor person's headache”, and *ebere ya gabigara oke* “His mercy is without bounds”. Thus, the African God is depicted as the quintessence and epitome of goodness, truth, justice and mercy. Being ‘good’ means that He cares for all Africans and is interested in the social and economic advancement of the people; this is reflected in provision of resources to satiate the existential needs of the people. The African God is depicted as living in the truth, implying that He is not deceptive. The Igbo believe that *eziokwu bụ ndu* “truth is life”, thus showing the value of truth in human life. The attribute of justice stems from the fact that this God is opposed to oppression; associating oppression to *isi na-awa ogbenye* “the poor man's headache” implies that he is odious to oppression and would not condone acts of oppression in the society. This attribute stands in stark contrast to the injustice prevalent in Africa; the rich oppress the poor; leaders, who are supposed to be servants, oppress the very citizens they are meant to serve, majority groups oppress minorities, the big bully the weak, etc. Portraying the African God as just means that he is against all the acts of oppression going on in the land. Finally, he is depicted as One whose mercy is limitless, signifying that he is always prepared to pardon wrong and give the offender a second chance. According to the Poet, once this God is appeased with foods such as *ji* “yam” and *ede* “cocoyam”, his anger is abated. The implication is that, it does not take much to appease this God and make him rescind his judgment on the offending individual. In the next few lines, the Poet wonders at skeptics that question the powers of the African God for various reasons

Ufodu si na o naghị akpa ike

*Maka ọ hapụrụ Namibia, Zimbabwe na Azania
N'aka ndị ọcha
Ụfọdụ chere na ọra eburula ya
Maka ọ naghị emenyụ ndị ọjọọ anya
Ụfọdụ sị na ọ bụ ọkiri a piri apị
N'ihia na ebere ya gabigara oke*

Some say that he does not demonstrate power
Because He left Namibia, Zimbabwe and Azania
In the hands of white people
Some think that He has fallen asleep
Because He does not punish evil people
Some say that He is a castrated bull
Because His mercy is too much

These physical and moral qualities evinced by the African God, as advanced by the Poet, puts him ahead of other gods *Chukwu ndị isi ojii kachasiri ike* "The African God is the strongest". It is against this background that the Poet wonders why people associate the African God with weakness *Ụfọdụ sị na ọ naghị akpa ike maka ọ hapụrụ Namibia, Zimbabwe na Azania n'aka ndị ọcha* "Some say that He does not demonstrate power because he left Namibia, Zimbabwe and Tanzania in the hands of white people". The question posed by the skeptics is, if the African God is really as strong as depicted by the Poet, why should he allow colonialism, especially the fact that, at this point in African history, Namibia, Zimbabwe and Tanzania were yet to gain independence. It seems an affront to the African God for imperialists to be in control of parts of Africa under his watch. The point advanced by the skeptics is that, as long as Africans are not free in their own country, but are ruled by strangers, the God of Africa must be emasculated. The African God is expected to push back the forces of colonialism and redeem Africans from the scourge of exploitation and imperialism. This expectation resonates with the situation in the scriptures, after a transformed and motivated Gideon (Jerubaal) threw down the altar of Baal, as recorded in the book of Judges. In reaction to what is considered by Baal worshippers as abomination, they trooped to the house of Gideon to fight Gideon. In response, the father of Gideon asked them the rationale for fighting for Baal, and ended up telling them that if Baal is a god indeed, it should contend for itself because its altar has been thrown down. In the same manner, the skeptics are asserting that, if the African God is a god indeed, it should have prevailed against the invading colonialists.

Aside colonialism and its depriving effects, other skeptics are not convinced about the prowess of the African God because He cannot deal with perpetrators of evil in the land *Ụfọdụ chere na ọra eburula ya maka ọ naghị emenyụ ndị ọjọọ anya* "Some say that he has fallen asleep because he does not punish evil people". This claim by the skeptics is founded on the reality of all manner of evil running across Africa unchecked; what with civil wars in that period, armed robbery, evil leaders, and in contemporary period, banditry, kidnapping, terrorism, etc. The position of the skeptics is that, a powerful African God should deploy its strength to contend with forces of evil in the land and check their

dominance. Yet other skeptics ridicule the African God because he is too merciful *Ufodu si na o bu okiri a piri api nihi na ebere ya gabigara oke* “Some say that he is an emasculated bull because his mercy is limitless”. The symbol of the bull in this context is apt; the bull is a ferocious animal that is known for fights with its deadly horns. However, an emasculated bull is incapable of mating not to talk of reproduction or producing offspring. In Igbo ideology, an emasculated man is no longer a man, having lost the very thing that makes him a male. In the context of the African God, being emasculated implies being rid of that which makes it a god; that is, the god has become a mere frail mortal, not different from men. Again, the position of skeptics is that, a god that thrives in mercy has been deprived of its powers, and is therefore weak. Having stated the reasons why skeptics disapprove of the African God, the Poet responds to the skeptics by drawing attention away from the African God

*Kedu ihe ji nwankita onwu?
Njo ndi ojii na-eme akarjala
Ila azu buuru ha ihe anuri
Nta oganihu anaghi emetu ha n'obi
Obi ojoo anyi bu ndi ojii esighi n'oke Chi anyi
Uba taa na echi
Ipunari mmadu ihe ya abughi oke Chukwu anyi
Kenyeere anyi
O bu ekike ndi ojii kenyeere onwe ha
Wee tugharia si na Chi ha adighi ike
Na Chi ha gbakwutara ha azu
Chi anyi di ebere kachasi Chi niile*

What is keeping the dog from death?
The evil of black people is too great
Backwardness is to them a thing of joy
The quest for progress does not touch their heart
The wickedness of us black people is not our portion from God
The wealth of today and tomorrow
To snatch another person's thing is not the portion our God
Gave to us
It is the portion black people gave to themselves
And turned around to say that their God is not strong
That their God turned His back on them
Our God is merciful more than other gods

At this point, the Poet stands in defence of the African God and replies the skeptics *Kedu ihe ji nwa nkita onwu* “What is keeping the dog from death?” This is a rhetoric question used in Igbo society to reference a dilemma or stalemate in proceedings. In reaction to this seeming stalemate, the Poet posits that the root of the African problem is in negativities perpetrated by Africans themselves, *njo ndi ojii na-eme akarjala* “evil done by black people is too great”. He is of the opinion that black Africa is saturated with evil

deeds perpetrated by Africans and not the gods. The Poet proceeds to precisely outline various evil deeds responsible for the fate that has befallen Africa as follows: *Ila azu buuru ha ihe anuri* “backwardness is a thing of joy for them”, *Nta oganiihu anaghi emetu ha n’obi* “the quest for progress does not touch their heart”, *Ụba taa naechi* “Riches of today and tomorrow” and *ipunari mmadu ihe ya* “To snatch another person’s thing”. Thus, the four acts of commission and omission such as, backwardness, inability to make progress, get-rich-quick syndrome, and robbery represent the Poet’s response to the position of the skeptics. Backwardness and unprogressive attitude is raised by the Poet as twin issues plaguing Africa. This aspect is related to economics and politics; African leaders are not taking proactive steps in advancing the economic interests of their countries. Taking joy in backwardness is the anti-thesis of desire and aspiration to adopt economic blueprints that would translate to progress. They are rather only interested in their own self and private concerns. This attitude is reflected in official corruption, where leaders line their pockets with the commonwealth, all at the expense of the pauperized citizenry. The consequence is that, rather than make progress, Africa will continue to slide and retrogress economically. The Poet is telling the skeptics that, the fault is not in the African God but in African leaders who promote their own interests above the interest of the collective. It is for this reason that, long after African countries have gained independence from the colonial masters, Africa remains under-developed and unprogressive; a situation where basic amenities such as water, electricity, good roads, etc. are lacking, in addition to mass poverty and privations justifies the Poet’s position.

Added to this pathetic malaise is the contemporary get-rich-quick syndrome *Ụba taa naechi* and robbery *ipunari mmadu ihe ya*... that, over the years, has characterized the African youth, and the leadership. The idea of getting rich in little or no time implies that the citizens do not value dignity in labour. Conventional wealth is based on long years of consistent productive work, planning and management of resources. It is for this reason that the Igbo believe that *aka aja aja na-ebute onu mmanu mmanu* “a sandy hand leads to an oily mouth” which means that when a person works, he eventually reaps the rewards in time. Another Igbo aphorism that supports hard work is *a ruo n’anwu, e rie na ndo* “If you work under the sun, you will eat under the shadows”. In referring to Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe (1958) submits that when a child washes his hands, he will join the elders to eat, signifying that Okonkwo had earned his place in the comity of elders through diligence and hard work. It is labour and work that translates to productivity and economic progress both for the individual and for the community; when people become rich without engaging in one form of legitimate labour or another, it means that they have followed an unorthodox route to achieve wealth. Such abnormal means include institutionalized corruption, budget padding by politicians, outright stealing of public funds, fraud (local or internet), money rituals, stealing/armed robbery, kidnapping and other heretical strategies used to make wealth at the expense of genuine labour. The fact is that no society moves forward where young people, who constitute the work force, and leaders who were elected to represent the people, use ‘alternative’ means to achieve wealth. The position of the Poet is that, it is situations such as this that is killing Africa and not that the African God is weak. The Poet seems to be suggesting that, it is not possible to have meaningful development in an atmosphere charged and replete with evil. More than that, the Poet is

telling the skeptics that, the fault is not in the African God, but in Africans themselves for reasons of evil deeds. According to the Poet *Obi ojoo anyi bu ndi ojii esighi n'oke Chi anyi...O bu ekike ndi ojii kenyeeere onwe ha, wee tugharia si na Chi ha adighi ike* "The wickedness of we Africans is not our portion from God...It is the portion black people gave to themselves, And turned around to say that their God is not strong".

Succinctly, the Poet is emphasizing that Africa should stop blaming the gods or the white colonial master's for their fate but should blame themselves for their developmental woes. The background to this spiritual dimension is that Africans are so attached to the gods that they believe that the gods are capable of doing everything for them, including fighting their battles. At the point of writing this poem and even in contemporary period, Africans naturally resort to the spiritual when they are confronted with any challenging situation, inclusive of health, food, economy, politics, etc.

The findings are divided into two; first is the major cause of Africa's problem which is political and economic as highlighted by the Poet. Second is the spiritual or religious dimension whereby Africans tend to resort to or blame spiritual forces for a situation they caused. In the first case, this poem is a clarion call for Africa to wake up from their slumber and take their destiny in their hands. It is pointless blaming the gods or the West for the problems of Africa, when opportunities are still there for Africa to redeem itself. Ngugi wa Thiong'o cited in (Suleiman, 1995) said that we must not become too fascinated by our gaze at the ruins of yesterday and forget the present. While Rodney's (1972) book "How Europe Underdeveloped Africa" is a historical chronicle of colonial exploitation, its contemporary relevance suggests that, Africa is yet to rise from the ashes of that exploitation. Europe may have divested Africa of vast resources and used it to build and establish their economies, but they did not leave Africa barren; there are still sufficient resources left to be used to develop Africa and turn it into a global power bloc. Sadly, the converse is the reality. Rather than African leaders to think inwards and use resources to build their entities, they are taking instructions from the same Europe that enslaved and emasculated them, with respect to political and economic policies, thus giving impression that, they cannot do without Europe. More worrisome is the fact that, corrupt African leaders mismanage their economies, embezzle a chunk of their common wealth and invest them in European banks and financial institutions, thus replicating the crime Rodney accused Europe of committing against Africa. If a response to Rodney's book can be written today, it should be aptly titled "How Africans are under-developing Africa". In today's Africa, Suleiman (2017) argues that there is total material exploitation and human sequestration by the ruling political class often referred to as "vampires" whose stock-in-trade is mindless exploitation of resources owned by the collective.

The fact is that the lack of desire for progress and backwardness, as outlined and affirmed by the Poet, are both outcomes of bad leadership occasioned by corruption. Kelly (2014) is of the view that, however it is viewed, corruption is endemically rooted in human societies, especially those with weak institutions in Africa, and that bad leadership is antithetical to societal progress, undermining societal development, and retarding social transformation. Aligned with this perception, Suleiman (2017) spells out the untoward

consequences of bad leadership to the citizens of Africa, including lack of political freedoms and economic stagnation. It is for these reasons that the promise and attainment of self-rule crystallizing in development, growth and urgent need to right the wrongs of colonialism are yet to materialize in Africa (Suleiman, 2017). In his book *The Trouble with Nigeria* written during Nigeria's Second Republic, Achebe strongly stated that the problem with Nigeria, and by extension Africa is bad and corrupt leadership. According to Achebe: Listen to Nigerian leaders and you will frequently hear the phrase, this great country of ours. Nigeria is not a great country; it is one of the most disorderly nations in the world. It is one of the most corrupt, insensitive, inefficient places under the sun. It is dirty, callous, noisy, ostentations, dishonest and vulgar. In short it is among the most unpleasant places on the earth. (Achebe, 1983: 7). No one could have described it better than the grandfather of African literature. Apparently, the deplorable situation portrayed by the Poet is similar to the conditions in the works of

The Poet condemns the tendency of Africans to think that spiritual forces have a hand in their situations. In the poem, the skeptics tend to believe that a strong spiritual foundation (instead of strong political and economic institutions) would have fought their enemies and prevented evil from overtaking the society. The Poet is not happy with Africans and bemoans this kind of fatalist belief system whereby one resigns to fate or expects gods to intervene in their affairs and provide solutions. It is this belief system that encourages resort to unorthodox and irrational strategies instead of critically evaluating a situation for the real causes. Citing Robert Kaplan's reports in "The Coming Anarchy", Akosah Sarpong (2007) posits that developmental problems are not solved by dabbling into the spiritual. While referring to Africa's development process, he chronicled the fate of African leaders who resorted to marabouts for political interventions. Such leaders include General Acheampong of Ghana who had a notoriety for consulting marabouts to the point that he was swimming every midnight in a particular river in Accra, as advised by the spiritual mediums, all in the desperation to avoid being overthrown. In spite of all the irrational measures, he was not only overthrown but killed. Jean-Bedel Bokassa of Central African Republic, who was accused of cannibalism as one of the rituals recommended by his many marabouts to strengthen his administration. Idi Amin Dada of Uganda was mentioned as perhaps the most rabid consultant of mediums. According to Akosah-Sarpong (2007), Idi Amin took directives from spiritual mediums to the point that he embarked on the deportment of Ugandan-Asians which impacted adversely on the economy of Uganda until his exit. The writer further states that spiritual mediums had so much grip on Gen. Abacha of Nigeria who imported some of them from Mali, Mauritania, Yemen, Burkina Faso, Saudi Arabia and India. The Nigerian dictator utterly depended on them so much that every political and economic policy was directed by the marabouts, including the idea of conducting important affairs of State by midnight at the place designated by the mediums. Others include Liberia's Samuel Doe and Foday Sankoh of Sierra Leone whose revolutionary leadership were derailed and truncated partly as a result of recourse to the use of spiritual mediums. According to Akosah-Sarpong (2017) the inclusion of spiritual elements or the resort to spiritual forces weakens the rationale capacities of the ruling class; the leaders and people become so unrealistic in their

assessment of situations, leading to using wrong measures which can only yield wrong results.

It is not forgotten that in 1986, during the Apartheid rule in South Africa, Nigeria was at the forefront of the battle to free South Africa from misrule, as a result of her foreign policy direction. However, at a point in the struggle, it was suggested by the President of Nigeria at the time, Gen Olusegun Obasanjo, to use African Juju to dislodge the white supremacist government in Pretoria (Kraft, 1987). Although his intention was well meant, it was a reflection of the yet to be broken umbilical cord connecting Africans to their ancestral past. Dirk Kohnert of Germany Institute of African Affairs (cited in Akosah-Sarpong, 2007) argues that, the belief in gods and resort to them and their agents are deeply rooted in many African societies irrespective of education, religion, and social class of the people concerned. To prove this fact, it is not too long ago that a prominent religious leader in Nigeria claimed, against all rationality, that Nigeria's socio-economic and security challenges is spiritual and needs spiritual solutions (Okojie, 2024), thus indirectly endorsing the current leadership and absolving them from blame. Rather than admit that the country is led by a team of rascals and criminals whose only objective of assuming power is to amass more wealth and further impoverish the common people, the cleric postulated that only God can solve the socio-political problems. This claim was made at a time it is widely known that Nigeria's economic recession is a result of two major factors; first is bad policies enunciated by the current leadership, particularly with respect to removal of oil subsidy and floating of the Naira. Second is that the leadership is steaming in corruption and profligacy, exemplified in the bogus and flamboyant lifestyle of the leadership in contrast to the poverty ravaging the down-trodden masses. Soon after this, to justify the claim that the Nigerian economic problem required divine intervention, the same cleric claimed that it was his prayers that halted the audacious slide of the Naira (Nigeria's currency) against the American Dollar. At this critical period, the Naira was exchanging for N1,700 per Dollar; according to the cleric, it was his prayers that halted the slide, otherwise, the ignominious slump would have reached N10,000 per Dollar (CKN News, 2024). That the clergy man could confidently hold his ground when one dollar was exchanging for an unenviable N1,700 Naira to the Dollar shows the rate at which reason has been sacrificed at the altar of faith. Despite the criticism that attended these pronouncements by the cleric, his followers continue to flock and consult him for spiritual guidance.

Such belief system is the reason for the mindless resort to spiritual forces in the quest for wealth, as highlighted by the Poet. Same is the reason for the mushrooming of spiritual churches all over Africa, particularly in Nigeria, Ghana, and South Africa, where people go to make consultations for every whim. Sadly, while playing religion, Africans fail to identify the part they played in their unfortunate realities, and the part they must play in correcting the societal ills that would eventually lead to transformation and economic development. For instance, many Africans believe that natural disasters such as flood, erosion, tornadoes are sent by the gods, without acknowledging their own acts of omission and commission in bringing about such harsh environmental conditions. Instead of this irrational resort to the spiritual, the present study aligns with the position of the Poet,

Chukwuezi that Africa's socio-political problems are caused by Africans and must be solved by Africans. Africans must not only own their problems, they must also take drastic and proactive steps towards solving them. It is a mark of weakness to expect God or the gods to solve a problem caused by man and which man has the capacity to solve. According to Ola Rotimi, the gods are not to blame. This position is aptly supported by William Shakespeare, in the tragedy of Julius Caesar where Cassius tells Brutus "The fault dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves that we are underlings". Cassius made that moving statement to Brutus, in reaction to the crowd hailing Caesar for being super-human; his intention is to remind Brutus that they have the power to take control of their lives and not resign to their fate as ordinary mortals or underlings. Among the Igbo, there are two major contrasting aphorisms that capture the ideology on fate, destiny or predestination, all related to the influence of the supernatural on human life. The first is pro-supernatural stating that fate can control a person, hence *o mekatara chi ekweghi, onye uta atana ya* "He who continues to make attempts but is negated by his chi (personal god) should not be blamed". The second is pro-human endorsing that a person has power to control their fate hence the maxim *onye kwe chi ya e kwe* "If one accents, their chi (personal god) will also accent". In the first aphorism, although it is the supernatural that drives the affairs of the person, the person is free to fight it, and it is possible for the person to be victorious in spite of the transcendental odds. The verb mekatara "continued attempts" represent the efforts put in by the individual to alter a certain fate they hate. In the second form, the person is the one driving their fate; the person has power to choose a fate, and the chi cannot negate it. Thus, everyone's destiny is in their hands.

In summary, it is evident that African leaders are presently making little or no efforts towards redeeming the economic soul of African and transforming their countries; what with mass poverty, hunger and privations ravaging African societies. This is in addition to the fact that, at no other time in history have African countries been more indebted to Europe and more dependent on economic ideas and blueprint from international financial institutions. Despite large-scale borrowing from the World Bank, countries such as Nigeria remain under-developed, thus questioning the way and manner the loans were expended and utilized. The worst scenario is that the political class are ever mindful of their own private needs as the impoverished masses continue to grovel in multidimensional poverty. This current situation has left the economy comatose, economic institutions fragile, political structures weak and the citizenry hopeless.

Conclusion

This study is an attempt at analyzing a literary work based on a recurring theme in Africa. It is a poem centered on the unpalatable social, political and economic condition of African countries, and the reaction of Africans to these conditions. Although the Poet is Igbo and the poem written in the Igbo medium, all black African countries are addressed. The Poet portrays black Africans as weak due to the fact that, they expect divine intervention in their socio-political affairs, instead of deploying their energies and channeling resources towards confronting their challenges. The Poet condemns a laggard attitude where Africans bemoan their fate and blame their gods for abandoning them, instead of taking their destiny in their hands. While blaming the gods, Africans close their eyes to the fact

that they are the cause of the problems ravaging their countries. It is posited in this study that, as long as Africans persist in the attitude of expecting external intervention to address problems of bad leadership, mismanagement of resources, insecurity and corruption, the much anticipated Eldorado and renaissance will remain a pipe dream.

The present study is limited to the estimation of political leadership in Nigeria by a poet, thus presenting readers with a personal and restricted perspective of the situation in Nigeria. It would be interesting to see an expanded view of the subject matter from more than one angle. Therefore, further studies could be comparative, either looking at the accounts of two Igbo poets or poets writing from two different mediums such as English and Igbo. Since Africa is not a homogenous group, future work should also focus on the political experience in other African countries from the viewpoint of writers. It will also be interesting to evaluate the account of present-day writers on the question of political leadership in Nigeria to see if there have been changes in the political landscape and if such changes have resulted in economic progress.

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