

# Knowledge and Its Significances in African Worldview: The Case of Igbos of Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God*

Ihejirika, Cardinal, Ph. D<sup>1</sup>, ThankGod, Bekweri, Amadi<sup>2</sup>, and Tamunosiki, Markson<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Philosophy, University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State – Nigeria

<sup>2</sup>Lecturer, Department of Philosophy, Faculty of Humanities, University of Portharcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2023.7534>

Received: 25 April 2023; Accepted: 09 May 2023; Published: 26 May 2023

## ABSTRACT

An individual's wealth of knowledge among other virtues determine his choices and in the case of a leader, how well he leads. The problem of leadership is a theme which runs through Achebe's trilogy namely, *No Longer at Ease*, *Things Fall Apart* and our present Text. In *Arrow of God*, Achebe decries the wane of both Igbo customs and traditions which followed the advent of colonialists and Christian missionaries into Africa. Ezeulu (who epitomizes Igbo customs and traditions) finds his traditional authority being challenged. This constituted an affront to the spirituality, social cohesion and stability of Igbo society. Even Ezeulu lost his life despite his ready receptivity of some pertinent ideological changes demanded by the times. The worrisome problem becomes: how could the reliable and stable Igbo worldview succumb to a divisive foreign epistemology? The battle of these two worldviews and cultures culminated in violence and death. Achebe condemns such violence and creates the need for a knowledge system that will engender societal development by harmonizing the positive elements of African and European worldviews. In order to bridge this epistemological gap, our study examines the notions of knowledge among the Igbos of *Arrow of God*, identifies their significances and proposes the idea of cultural integrativism as a panacea for cultural and ideological conflicts. The researcher adopted the analytical and hermeneutical methods of inquiry.

**Keywords:** Knowledge, Significance, Notion, Epistemology, Culture, Conception.

## INTRODUCTION

Knowledge in pragmatic circles is perceived as an instrument employed to guide human conduct and orientate her activities toward problem-solving. Besides the mere love for knowledge for its own sake, and the honour it bestows on the possessor, it is also considered as one of the criteria for leadership. For knowledge claims to be worthwhile, epistemologists insist that such claims must be certain, true and self-evidencing hence, knowledge differs from opinion and belief. However, this possession of critical judgment – a secure sense of discerning intelligence, accurate assessment of people and situations; a good understanding of Igbo ontology and values as enshrined in *Omenala* (which literary means that which obtains in the land-customs) are glaring indices of the possession of wisdom and knowledge among the African Igbo of Achebe's *Arrow of God*.

This conception of knowledge contrasts the Whiteman's epistemic criterology and worldviews. The latter's conception of knowledge is founded on literacy, formal schooling, respect for colonial authorities and the belief in the God of Christian religion. This epistemological cum cultural impasse dovetailed into avoidable blood-letting and violence, which not only claimed the life of the novel's hero, Ezeulu but simultaneously,

constituted undesirable elements which Achebe identified in both Igbo and the Whiteman's cultures. Achebe faulted this negative tenor and further made a strong case for the need of an epistemology of social integration and harmony, which our present work attempts to provide. The necessity of this epistemology arises consequent upon the reality that no human or social development is achieved in a crises – ridden society.

Our study therefore examines the notions of knowledge among Igbos of *Arrow of God* with the specific aim of highlighting both the cherished values in *Omenala* and the roles and significances of knowledge both to the individual and to the making of a peaceful human society. This identified need for a novel epistemology transcends the possession of a good understanding of Igbo customs and tradition (*Omenala*) and her associated values but entails a disposition that is demonstrable behaviorally in such a manner that enhances among others: the welfare of man, safety of his environment, the making of a harmonious society as well as the ability to factor solutions to the aggregate problems of man.

In order to achieve the foregoing, our study first handily unveils the Igbo epistemic circle. It further discusses the differences between Igbo and Western conceptions of knowledge before finally, articulating Igbo notions of knowledge as found in *Arrow of God*. This discussion offered us a bird's eye view into the right path for the realization of our suggested idea of a cultural integrative epistemology. This novel idea engenders the development of the African (Igbo) society by opening it up to receive beneficial elements found in other cultures and worldviews.

## IGBO NOTIONS OF KNOWLEDGE IN ARROW OF GOD AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCES

*Arrow of God* has been variously described as Achebe's most ample novel by Oladele Taiwo in his *Culture and The Nigerian Novel* (1976) and as his best and certainly most philosophical novel by Prof. C. S. Nwodo in his *Philosophical Perspective on Chinua Achebe* (2004). "It belongs with *Things Fall Apart* to the early period dealing with Igbo traditional society and their initial encounter with colonialism" (Nwodo, 2004:26). The theme however is the same that runs through all Achebe's novel's namely; *The Problem of Leadership* but more importantly, Achebe in *Arrow of God*, defines who the Igbos are and laments the demise of social solidarity among them due to the influence of colonialism. The novel exposes the problems facing the Igbo race and by extension all Africans. He goes a bit further to suggest possible solutions to the challenges that threaten African (Igbo) corporate existence. In Taiwo's words, "the action of the novel is provided by a three-dimensional conflict: a personal conflict between Ezeulu and Nwaka supported by Ezidemili; a political conflict between Umuaro and Okperi and a battle of the gods between Ulu and Idemili. There is also the conflict between Ezeulu and the British Administration. At the centre of all these conflicts, and drawing all together into one complex whole is Ezeulu" (Taiwo, 1976:132).

The summary of the story as given to us by Paul Wearing reveals that:

Ezeulu, the Chief Priest of Ulu, finds his authority under threat. He has rivals in the tribe, in the white government, and even in his own family, so he was surrounded by trouble. He adopts an increasingly cosmic view of events; surely, in the battle of deities, he is merely an arrow in the bow of his God Armed with such ideas, Ezeulu is prepared to lead his people on, if necessary, to destruction and annihilation. "The power of the people, however reasserts itself" (Wearing, 1974).

As Stephen D. Ross in his *Literature & Philosophy: An Analysis of the Philosophical Novel* (1969) rightly opines: "The only legitimate way for literature to embody philosophy is to display a philosophical attitude" (Ross, 1969:3-4). The book, *Arrow of God* actually does this. In it, Achebe gives expression to those indigenous attributes which he would have liked to see preserved and fully developed but for colonialism.

He emphasizes moral values especially devotion to the family (nuclear and extended). We find loyalty to the community, the need for truthfulness and faithfulness; social justice; hard work; resourcefulness, openness to positive change, tolerance and the rejection of absolutism of any type in religion or politics. These are values in Igbo culture as found in this novel.

These laudable virtues were dealt a death blow with the life stifling combination of colonial administration, Western education, commercialism and Christianity. These forces combined to destroy the normal historical progress and development of the Igbo and Africans. But prior to this time, Igbos had within their culture, a complex system of language, folklore, proverbs, dance, music, poetry, religion and social organization. The foregoing constitutes a rich deposit of basic ingredients of civilization, which await thematic expression and articulation.

Given the Igbo natural intelligence, dynamism, nobility, mobility and openness to positive change, Achebe observes that, “if colonialism had not interrupted things”, the people would have actualized those potentials for development. An instantiation of the foregoing is Serumaga’s comparison of Ezeulu with Okonkwo in his *Interview with Chinua, Achebe*. He underscores the weakness in Ezeulu and therefore submits that, “Ezeulu, the Chief character in *Arrow of God* is a different kind of man from Okonkwo. He is intellectual. He thinks about why things happen – he is a priest and his office requires this – so he goes to the root of things and he’s ready to accept change, intellectually. He sees the value of change and therefore his reaction to Europe is completely different from Okonkwo’s. He is ready to come to terms with it upto a point except where his dignity is involved. This he could not accept; he is very proud. So you see, it’s really the other side of the coin, and the tragedy is that they come to same sticky end” (Serumaga, 1967:3).

It is on account of Ezeulu’s obstinacy despite the persuasion of the men of substance of the land that Ogbuefi Akuebue would remind him (Ezeulu) that, “no man wins judgment against the clan” (Achebe, 1964:131). This is because the clan meets and agrees after everyone has spoken before taking decisions. Commenting on the republican spirit of the Igbo, Okoro avers that,

...The willingness of citizens to participate directly in the civic affairs, to identify their good with the common good and to cater for and sacrifice for public weal was at the epi-centre of the Igbo spirit. This republican virtue in the traditional society was considered as the moral sense in the citizens that enable them to pursue the common good. Accordingly, the republican virtue makes it possible for self interest and public virtue not to be disjunctive. Therefore, the republican state generates public affections and mobilizes solidarity and community consideration in feeling and behaviours. This made the Igbo traditional society to be humanistic as it organizes itself to ensure that values are harmonized and at the same time ensure the autonomy of the individual to the collective destiny of the Igbo race (Okoro, 2007:204).

## A BIRD’S EYE VIEW INTO IGBO EPISTEMIC CIRCLE

Besides the embodiment of Igbo ethical values and mores in *Omenala*, the full expression of their full epistemic worldview is in this circle which forms our present discussion in this sub-section. Among the Igbos, knowledge (*Amamaihe*) is considered a correlation of its embodying concepts of *Ako* (intelligence or tact), *Uche* or *Echiche* (Thought or Thinking), *Izu* (Wisdom) and *Amumamu* (Learning/Nka-Skill). When confronted with challenges (*Ihe imaka nihu*) or problems otherwise considered as indeterminate situations (*Nmekpahu*), *Ako* (Intelligence) gets challenged and disturbed hence, it gets activated to its apex in search of a solution.

Ijiomah tells us that it does this through the receptable of *Uche* (Thought). The process *Ako* and *Uche* interact is namely, *Echiche* (Thinking) (Ijioma, 1996:19). *Ako* (Intelligence) that is characteristically continuously busy whether confronted with a problem or not. This is the reason man is naturally an ever thinking being. However, when *Ako* is disturbed by *Iheimakanihu* (challenges) or *Mmekpahu* (problems), it

immediately commences a search for solutions and does this through *Uche* and *Echiche* (Thought or Thinking). The latter *Uche* or *Echiche* (Thought or Thinking as Ijiomah suggests, represent a receptacle which has the potency called *Ntumizu* or *Amanihe* (Wisdom), which is understood in this context as right appropriation or application of both intelligence and knowledge.

In any case, *Ako* (Intelligence) is ambivalent, when *Ako* is morally sound, untainted, well informed and sufficiently guided by human ethical values, *Amamaihe* (Wisdom) results. A related term *Ntumizu* has to do with the measure of wisdom exhibited by people. On the other hand, when *Ako* (Intelligence) gets seared or corrupt, when bereft of proper moral and ethical grooming along the lines of *Omenala* – the customs, values and mores of the Igbo people, such intelligence (*Ako*) takes up a negative role by interpreting and employing everything around it as mere tools that serve personal interests. When human and humane interests are discarded, *Aghughho* (treachery or craftiness), results, which is a function of misguided cleverness. Though treachery and cunning may bring in material results as observed among present day fraudsters notoriously called “yahoo boys”. Yet, such treachery cannot be pragmatically applauded among the Igbos. The reason is that it is a transgression of *Omenala* and as such *Aru* (Abomination or desecration of the land). Scarce wonder Mbonu Ojike “describes Igbo cosmology as *Omenalism* and regards it as an attempt to attain a balance of cosmic forces” (Ojike, 1955:15). For Nwala, “*Omenala* refers to the actual, practice of the customs as they apply to any aspect of social and ritual life of the various communities in Igbo. *Omenala* is also the realization of the culture and civilization of the Igbo...” it is also (addition mine) a body of law and morals along with metaphysical foundations” (Igbo Philosophy, p. 27).

The possession of a good understanding of the Igbo worldview through mastery of *Omenala* confers on the possessor, great respect among his tribe. Knowledge in this Igbo enclave is, therefore, the moral application of *Ako* working on the receptacle *Uche* or *Echiche* (Thought or Thinking) to resolve *Iheimakanihu* or *Nmekpanu* (challenges, worry or problems). These challenges are not static rather, they keep changing as long as life tarries because they are existential realities. Because of this, as challenges and problems continue *ad infinito* confront man, also knowledge in the socio-cultural worldviews of the Igbos gets unendingly revised in a dynamic manner that identifies with the need of adapting to changes.

## A COMPARISON OF WESTERN AND IGBO CONCEPTIONS OF KNOWLEDGE

This comparison of Western and Igbo worldviews will expose the reasons the Westerners misunderstood Africans and vice versa. In any case, it was Ihejirika who aptly observed that, “The cross hybridization of cultures in today’s world through information technology and the entire sciento-technological adventure and their subsequent effects on cultural epistemologies are enormous. Hence, any projection of a culturally destructive epistemology may receive some criticisms because it may lack universality. But the truth remains that it is our peculiarities that give us our unique identities as persons or communities” (Ihejirka 2016:180).

The above citation clarifies that there exists some peculiarities in any culture that distinguish it from another. We will therefore attempt to unveil the conceptions of knowledge in western worldview against the Igbo’s. While it must be admitted that there is hardly any controversy free definition of knowledge except its etymological meaning, we must limit ourselves to meanings of knowledge that are relevant to our present assignment.

Prior to the submissions of E. L. Gettier epistemology, Western Epistemologists held a consensus position that if a belief is true, and it can be justified then, it qualifies as knowledge. Hence, the traditional western characterization of knowledge as justified true belief (Omogbe 1998:15). However, Gettier contends the inadequacy of justified true belief being conceived as knowledge. He argues that a person could believe something which is true, he could be justified in believing it, yet, he lacks knowledge of it (Gettier, 1963).



He gave many instances buttressing his case and had the big support of Bertrand Russell, who opined that it is very easy to give examples of true belief that are not knowledge. In Russell's words, "there is the man who look at a clock which is not going through he thinks it is, and who happens to look at it at the moment when it is right. The man acquires a time belief as to the time of the day but cannot be said to have knowledge" (Russell, 1948:155).

Consequent upon the foregoing, Hamilyn submits that for a person to know something he must not be guessing, he must not hit on the truth by chance, he must not rely on bad reasons if he relies on reasons at all (Hamilyn, 1970:101). He therefore concluded that "knowing is being in the appropriate positions to clarify or give one's authority or warrant to the truth of what is said to be known (Hamilyn, 1970:102). A. J. Ayer offers three conditions that must be met before a person can be said to know something "the necessary and sufficient conditions for knowing that something is the case are first that "that one is said to know be true, secondly, that one be sure of it and thirdly, that what should have the right to be sure" (Ayer, 1956:34).

This Western conception of knowledge therefore has truth, certainty and the right to certainty as necessary conditions for knowledge. At other times, beliefs though not synonymous with knowledge (in this worldview) can sometimes turn to knowledge when it is based on conclusive evidence. Therefore, any belief that gets justified becomes knowledge in a similar way a scientific hypothesis passes into theory when repeatedly corroborated and verified. The pitfall of this epistemic worldview consists in its overemphasis on justification, methodology and evaluation premise which assumes that the process through which a thing is realized is the thing itself but there is a clear difference between a process and that which is realized from the process.

When the foregoing is compared with African (Igbo) notions of knowledge, a wide perspectival gap surfaces. There is something unique about the Igbo epistemic circle which betrays their avowed inclination to the supernatural. This inclination to the supernatural provides a framework functional enough to protect not only the living but the non living aspects of humanity. The African inexplicably identifies himself with the object, sympathizes with it and even dies as himself in order to be reborn to the other. As Senghor puts it, "...The African assimilates himself with the object to be reborn... he does not realize that he thinks, he feels that he feels, he feels his existence, he feels the other, he is drawn towards the others, into the rhythm of the other to be reborn in knowledge of the world. Thus, the act of knowledge is an agreement of conciliation with the world, the simultaneous consciousness and creation of the world in its indivisible unity" (The Spirit of Civilization 8 – 10).

These differences between the Africans and Westerners remain for Senghor, enduring and ontological. In discussing this holistic attitude of the African Igbo to knowing, we will consider what a thing is before delving into what its' conditions are. As Ijiomah suggests in his *Humanizing Epistemology*, this approach will help us to avoid what he calls "the scandal of metaphysics" (Ijiomah 1996:17). This scandal of metaphysics refers to the approach of contemporary epistemologists, who incurably stick to the primary problem of traditional epistemology (which focuses on a justification and evaluation methodology) at the neglect of the fact that it is the nature (what is) of an object that determines its justification, methodology and evaluation.

To be specific, among the Igbos, being knowledgeable means becoming sufficiently indoctrinated into the forms of Igbo knowledge system as couched in *Omenala*. Nwala explains that,

*Omenala* refers to the actual practice of the customs as they apply to an aspect of social and ritual life of the various communities in Igbo... indeed, *Omenala* is also the realization of the culture and civilization of the Igbo, if you fail to do anything in the way it is supposed to be done under the custom of the people, they say, *Omeghe Omenala* or *Omeghiyadika Omenala* – it was not done according to custom, *Omenala* includes major beliefs about the origins of the universe and its nature, the place of spirits, deities, main and other

beings in the universe, the nature or character of taboos (*Aru*), regulations, prescriptions and prohibitions as to what is proper in such a universe, rules of marriage, sexual intercourse attitudes to strangers,... forms of social relationship, as well as the realm of simple decency and etiquette. Indeed, *Omenala* is a body of law and morals along with metaphysical foundation (Nwala 1985:27).

The above understanding of *Omenala* entails an enormous erudition in the people's ontology. What *Omenala* demands may not exclude appreciation of a foreign worldview in as much as such novel worldview will not deny the Igbo his unique identity. For instance, Ezeulu the chief character in *Arrow of God* is seen as an intellectual, who thinks about why things happen. Serumaga comparing him with Okonkwo of *Things Fall Apart* says that, "Ezeulu is a priest and his office requires he goes to the root of things and he's ready to accept change, intellectually. He sees the value of change and therefore his reaction to Europe is completely different from Okonkwo's. He is ready to come to terms with it upto a point except where his dignity is involved. This he could not accept" (Serumaga 1967:3). Ezeulu in the above citation, portrays the glaring dynamism of Igbos. Their openness and readiness to receive a progressive knowledge system that fuses with *Omenala* to solve human problems. The attitude refutes the argument against *Omenala* as a stringent unchanging doctrine that resists revision.

In fact, knowledge among the Igbos is the moral application of *Ako* (Wisdom or tact) working in the receptacle *Uche* or *Echiche* (Thought or Thinking) to resolve *Nmakpahu* (Problems). Therefore, as long as man's existential realities reveal unending challenges, knowledge in this enclave gets unendingly revised to meet emerging challenges and the needs of the people. Hence, knowledge is a potentiality that finds its full weight in actualization. Pragmatic knowledge best describes Igbos attitude to knowing. Summarily put, knowledge among the Igbos could be understood as a disposition demonstrated behaviorally in a manner that is favourable to human welfare or to the solution of human problems. It is self reconstructing and therefore not absolute. It may be relative but its relativity smirks off individualism because it at each time, emerges as a result of a particular social community problems. And we must bear in mind that among the Igbos, the individuals become meaningful only in an organic complementary social realm.

The wise man among the Igbos is therefore the pragmatic one, who has the ability to apply his knowledge to solving problems when the need arises and that includes erudition in Igbo *Omenala*. This comes with social recognition among the Igbos hence, wise men are held in high esteem and honour, such men are sent on diplomatic and peace missions because they are seen as having *Amamihe* (being wise and knowledgeable).

## KNOWLEDGE IN IGBO WORLDVIEW AND ITS SIGNIFICANCES IN ARROW OF GOD

At this stage, we will now attempt to sieve out from the Novel, *Arrow of God*, some pertinent Igbo notions of knowledge and their significances.

- **The Notion of Ontological Understanding of reality as a pre-requisite for knowledge**

The setting of *Arrow of God* is a cultural one, which necessitates the correct understanding and interpretation of the people's ontology in order for anybody to relate with or establish meaningful connection with the Igbo. First, Igbos have reverence for the natural, which they regard as holy and sacred. They respect the ordered way of nature and abhor any form of unnaturalness, the abuse or misuse of the nature of reality. For any leader (missionary, colonial or indigenous) to successfully paddle the leadership boat among the Igbo, this knowledge was necessary. The true assessment of the Igbo society, the unique characteristics of the Igbos themselves, their social organization, and the nature of those values the Igbo society stands for as well as the nature of abomination it opposes.

The failure of Ezeulu was as a result of his inability to reckon that the responsibility of his leadership demanded that he jettisons self-pride in order to recognize the primacy of the clan's survival. The nature of the Igbo society has always been such that the society's wellbeing towers over and above the individuals'. Ezeulu was too intellectually proud, too intransigent, too rigid and uncompromising to members of his community. From this ontology, it is clear that the traditional Igbo republicanism combines personal enterprise, strive and independent mindedness with the moral commitment to solidarity and devotion to duty.

Asouzu buttresses the foregoing argument and equates "uwa" ontology with the concept of "umunna" (kinsmen), which he maintains is an in road to understanding the world view of the Igbo people expounded around the idea of communalism (Asouzu, 2007:204).

#### • The Notion of responsibility as a mark of knowledge among Igbos

In the Igbo traditional society, as could be seen in *Arrow of God*, being knowledgeable has to do with realizing the entailment, expectations of what goes with one's office. Quoting Achebe, "Yes, it was right that the Chief Priest should go ahead and confront danger before it reached his people. That was the responsibility of his priesthood" (Achebe, 1964:189). All citizens of Igbo community shared in this weight of responsibility, which suffices for protocols to be broken if the end will be the clan's survival. In a situation where the life of the community stands at risk, whatever stands in the way including the gods must concede, so that the clan might be saved. In Nwodo's words, "this emphasizes the absolute importance attached to the survival of the community and the responsibility everybody concerned owe to its survival" (Nwodo, 2004:38). Internal cohesion within the community, necessary for effective resistance to external aggression, constituted the responsibility of both the leader and the led. Ezeulu's pride could not allow him to fully appreciate this notion of responsibility hence, he considered this Igbo community as solely and strictly based upon religious foundations. Ulu, no doubt played the role of a spiritual principle for the unity and sustenance of the community but the principles of unity and preservation of the clan combined with what Nwodo calls the ontological residue to rightly define this notion of responsibility. This is because any failure in understanding any of these principles rub off on another principle and terminates in failure of leadership. Consequently, for a leader among the Igbos of *Arrow of God* and by extension African society to be considered knowledgeable, he must come to terms with this notion of responsibility, which otherwise put, relates to a good patriotic spirit that recognizes the demands citizens make on the free born among the Igbo.

Achebe however combines various notions of responsibility; as a requirement of one's office or position in society, as moral obligation to the community and to their deity. To live up to the image of a wise leader or citizen, demands understanding of all these senses of responsibility. This markedly distinguished Igbos from the colonialists, traders and white missionaries.

#### • The Notion of Truth as Knowledge

Truth as Ezeulu would have us believe in the book, *Arrow of God* is a moral obligation which defines both integrity of a good father as well as that of the revered chief priest who holds the holy staff of confirmation of a curse or blessing. To hold "Ofo" and "Ogu" among the Igbo means "to be completely on the side of justice" (Iwuagwu, 1998:71-72). The *Ofo* stick therefore is symbolic and emblematic of the truth. Among the Igbos, the *Ogu* Corpus is the body of righteousness, the sum total of justice. It consists of the moral law of God as revealed to the Igbo in the original universal revelation and the rules of social life built chain up the centuries and were handed over by oral traditions. Iwuagwu reports that: "the symbolic representation of the *Ogu* or justice is the *Ofo*, a short sacred rod about one foot long and about nine inches circumference... In oath taking, curse or blessing, the *Ofo*-holders sit in a semi-circle and knock the sacred rod on the ground with their echoes" (Iwuagwu, 1998:68). In *Arrow of God*, it is discovered that this notion of truth defines a

knowledgeable person. It will also be pertinent at this juncture to point out in accordance with the observation of Ayos, Ademole, Ikenga-Metuh and Ojoade that: “Traditional African theory of knowledge sees knowledge in terms of wisdom and insight into the various individual and social problems,. This is partly so because of the belief in the practical usefulness of knowledge rather, than knowledge for its own sake” (Metuh & Ojoade, 199:161).

However, truth from the foregoing is highly prized among the Igbo. Scarce wonder, the Igbos say “Eziokwu n’agba ka onwa” meaning “the truth shines like the moon” (Achebe, 1964:7). But in *Arrow of God*, what constitutes the truth regarding the real owners of the land between Umuaro and Okperi was disputed hence, Ogbuefi Nwake asserts that, “(what his father the truth) told him differs from Ezeulu’s account. Though, he could not expressly accuse Ezeulu of lying. He, however employed the services of proverbs to aptly communicate his disagreement with Ezeulu’s opinion. This, he did by making the land debate a relative issue. He consequently opines; “wisdom” is like a goatskin bag; every man carries his own... knowledge of the land is also like that” (Achebe, 1964:16).

The implication of this, is that there seems to be less emphasis on absolute truth. While relativist and subjectivist approaches to truth may sometime be tolerated depending on the circumstance, prominence is always given (and by the community) to pragmatic theory of truth, which “conceives truth from the point of usefulness, utility, workability and scientificity” (Ozumba, 2001:71).

Howbeit, Achebe puts forward in *Arrow of God* and in a ritualistic and symbolic form, a solution to the threat of colonialism as well as to any subsequent danger. The foregoing reveals that each member of this community was entitled to believe whatever his or her father told them (oral tradition). This belief lacks evidence except the trust on the honesty and integrity of their fathers hence, every Igbo has the liberty of holding different view even if they are conflicting in as much as the community’s view point wins at the end of the day. Despite the belief in the stories (oral tradition) of our fathers, we also know that the core of the truth of their descent is beyond the knowledge of many fathers. The history and land ownership stretched too far into the past for anybody to be absolutely certain. The Chief Priest confided in his youngest son, Nwafo this: “A man does not speak a lie to his son. Remember that always, to say my father told me is to swear the greatest oath” (Achebe 1964:93). Similarly, Ezeulu confesses; “But how could a man who held the holy staff of Ulu know that a thing was a lie and speak? How could he fail to tell the story as he had heard if from his father?” (Achebe, 1964:6-7). Truth is so indispensable in this community that the Chief Priest of Ulu had to be bold enough to testify in Court before the Whiteman against his own people in this land case with Okperi people. The reasons for which the Westerners, Winterbottom called Ezeulu “the only witness to the truth” (Achebe, 1964:6-7).

In a society where oral traditional remained for centuries the main, if not the only, source of knowledge of the past, it became absolutely imperative that family history, including accounts of the ownership of landed property, should be truthfully handed down. It would be unimaginable for the father of a family to consciously mislead his descendants in matters of their history. But you will agree with me that these fathers can only pass on the truth they know, which may not be without distortions and all the weakness of oral tradition.

#### ● The Notion of Acculturation as Knowledge

The notion of acculturation in the context of the Igbo society of *Arrow of God* is seen in the tendencies of Umuofians to identify with cultural traits other than theirs. Their contact with the Whiteman (who have different ways of life) necessitated the need for culture change hence, Ezeulu despite his position in the clan, thought it wise to send his son, Oduche to the missionary school as he said, “to be his eyes there”. The deity of the land namely; Ulu would also inspire and use his priests as instruments of change. Ezeulu’s ancestors were also such instruments. His grandfather “put a stop to ichi in Umuaro”. After that people stopped



carving their “faces as if they were ozo doors” (Achebe, 1964:132). His father set aside the custom which made any child born to a widow, a slave...” (Achebe, 1964:132).

Besides, in pursuance of the relevant knowledge of the times, Oduche needed to master the Whiteman’s knowledge so much so that if he is woken up and asked what it is, he will reply. As Ezeulu puts it “you must learn it until you can write it with your left hand. That is all I want to tell you” (Achebe, 1964:189-190). Although motivated by material acquisition, John Nwodika (Captain T. K. Winterbottom’s Steward) lamented his people’s non-involvement in the Whiteman’s tobacco trade. For him, his ambition or rather his sense of responsibility to his clan was to represent it in the tobacco trade.

Ezeulu was receptive of the new culture to an appreciable length in as much as it does not encroach on his integrity. Culture in this society assumes a new meaning. In Udoiem’s words, “it ceases to be a celebration of the past ways of life as opposed to a lived way of life... this misconstrued notion makes culture to be something static and belonging to the past... that no longer have any practical relevance to the lived life or present day concerns” (Udoiem, 2014:6). Here, we can infer an openness to new ways of life even in the very mind of Ezeulu who, championed the course of the traditional ways of life. This is a duality with a possibility that can be exploited to enrich Igbo and by extension, African culture with those of external accretions.

#### • **Restraint and Reticence as marks of Knowledge**

The quality of reflective intellectualism was epitomized by Ezeulu through his reliance and restraint even in the face of provocation and this quality is so highly esteemed among the Igbo. The novel is full of instances of Ezeulu’s show of restraint and reticence. His friend Akuebue had come to remonstrate against his sending one of his sons, Oduche to mission school. The timing unknown to Akuebue, was wrong. Ezeulu had just got over a family quarrel. “Ezeulu listened silently to him, holding back with both hands the mounting irritation he felt” (Achebe, 1964:130). As the discussion progressed, Akuebue accused him of doing what he did “to please a stranger” (Achebe, 1964:133). Ezeulu was now getting angry. “This stung Ezeulu sharply but again, he kept a firm hold on his anger” (Achebe, 1964:133). Ezeulu’s comportment and self discipline in these contexts present him as a mature and a wise fellow. It was his habit not to easily and publicly let go his emotion be it of anger, of anxiety or of curiosity thus when his son, Obika noticed his father’s restlessness on their first night of detention at Okperi, he wanted but declined to ask his father what was the matter. As Achebe puts it, “He knew it would be useless asking him questions in his present mood. Even at the best of times, Ezeulu only spoke when he wanted to and not when people asked him” (Achebe, 1964:158).

This restraint was gradually rubbing off on his child, Obika. Tactfulness in talking is so cherished that Igbos bestow honour on people who master the act of talking hence, we have such titles like “Okwubunka” – (words are a craft), “Ezeokwu” (king of words), Oka-okwu (wordsmith or expert in words) in Igboland and only such men are sent on diplomatic missions, to represent the Igbos consequent upon their skills construed as their wealth of knowledge in the use of words. Besides, Ezeulu’s reticence and restraint created mystique around him that further marked him out as an interesting and a very wise character in the novel.

#### • **The Notion of Supernaturalism/Revelation as a reliable source of knowing**

The belief in deities pervade the novel, *Arrow of God* in a disturbing magnitude. Definitively put, supernaturalism as used here refers to the doctrine of “spiritual revelation together with the belief in providence, the efficacy of prayer and related doctrines as opposed to rationalism” (The New Websters, 2004:1259).

The Igbo clan is a corporate essence whose corporate existence involves more than the sum of the village

and individuals that compose it. There are the gods, including the Earth Goddess (Ala or Ani), who form “the object of worship. The concept of Earth goes beyond the regular ground upon which people walk, farm and build houses. She is the source of life and fertility, the womb of things, the resting place for the dead. There are ancestors, the dead, who were great and successful in their days. Their intervention and influence continue to be felt. There are the living, among whom elders form a special part of the membership of the clan. This is not because of their age alone but because of their leadership roles. There are the unborn, waiting for the proper time, there is finally the sky (Igwe). “Every land has its own sky...” The sky and earth together form the confines of the clan. All these, constitute the members of the clan.

As Nwodo rightly observes,

The corporate existence of the Igbo clan goes still further than the religious. It postulates a spiritual principle as source of being in the sense of being a non-material principle but rather in the sense of being the principle of being, the basis of existence. It is not first the principle of life as a form of existence but existence itself in any form. It is prior, ontologically, to the gods, and other spirits including the Earth. It constitutes the basis of morality that is not based in religion, that field being the premise of the Earth Goddess. It operates at various levels. As the principle of being and a spiritual substance at the same time, it is operative at two levels of the Igbo being, the basis and core of Igbo existence as Igbo both individual and collective. At the individual level, it is unique and immediate and therefore personalized. The individual Chi is usually seen as its medium of operation, as a distributive principle. At the level of the community, it is transcendental and cohesive, and therefore generalized, a common denomination of Igbo-ness. It thus creates an ambivalent polarity that could give rise to some conflicts in Igbo society and misunderstanding on the part of the outsider. Being both individual and general at the same time, it is the source of Igbo individual characteristics and peculiarities, giving a special twist to their individuality, self reliance and resourcefulness. It is equally the source of Igbo collective consciousness and identity. It completes the essence of Igbo clan being the soul of its co-operate essence. In the case of Umuaro clan, its medium is symbolized by the deity, Ulu and through its Chief Priest. But it can always operate in and through the medium of anyone of the members. Its responsibility is always the preservation and unity of the clan... (Nwodo, 2004:35-36).

By the foregoing, we discover that the Igbo holds on tightly to the belief in the supernatural, which through deities give their revelations which are considered as invaluable knowledge. At certain levels of operation, the Chief Priest is known, but at other levels, especially when the deity possesses him, he becomes unknowable “but you cannot know the thing which beats the drum to which Ezeulu dances” (Achebe, 1964:132). Ezeulu himself based on revelational knowledge could claim: “I can see tomorrow, that is why I can tell Umuaro; come out from this because there is death there or do this because there is profit in it” (Achebe, 1964:192). On another occasion, Ulu revealed part of his design to his Chief Priest and in the process, he made the human agent realize perhaps for the first time that “he was no more than an arrow in the bow of his god” (Achebe, 1964:179). The deity, Ulu was the protector of the clan, a symbol of unity and also the soul of the community. Scarce wonder, the introduction of the Christian God by the missionaries constituted an unpleasant bolt from the blue to somebody like Ezeulu. Worse still, the Whiteman’s culture was not only, alien but challenging, that is why Ezeulu told John Nwodika that his first encounter with the Whiteman was not the end but the beginning of a wrestling match. “Ezeulu laughed. “You call this wrestling? No my clansman, we have not wrestled; we have merely studied each other’s hand. I shall come again...” (Achebe, 1964:41). When will he come again? It is hard to say. “Everybody in Umuaro knows that Ulu was made by our fathers long ago. But “Idemili was there at the beginning of things” (Achebe, 1964:192). And that is why “his Python may again come to power”. Is he talking about cultural revival someday? Your guess is as good as mine.

In any case, it seems this may occur when the Igbo as a corporate entity would have completely absorbed

and digested whatever the rest of the world offers, when an Igbo higher synthesis; spiritual, cultural, technological, would have been achieved but the general impression created at the end of the day is that whatever changes may come in religion, science and technology, in whatever field of human endeavour, the Igbo community has the capacity in principle to internalize them, transform them, improve upon them, and still remain essentially Igbo.

## CONCLUSION

This study has attempted an examination of the significance of knowledge among the Igbos with particular reference, to the Igbos of Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God*. In the process of this examination, we observed that in order to rightly understand the Igbo perspectives of knowledge, there is first the need to realize the overwhelming influence of Igbo *Omenala* (customs and traditions) on the behavioural responses of the Igbo man. As the Novel, *Arrow of God* reveals, *Omenala*-the canon of Igbo man's values, is primarily responsible for his worldviews. His reception of new ideas is highly dependent on the congruence of any novel epistemology to his *Omenala* and the much cherished societal mores and values it couches. However, our study also observed an attitude of openness to other cultures and foreign worldviews once such has the capability of working in tandem with *Omenala* while maintaining Igbo peculiar or unique identity as well as cooperate (social) personality. We however exploited this readiness to admit the positive sides of other cultures to arrive at the articulation of our suggested idea of cultural integrativism. This idea is hoped to drive human cum social development in a harmonious society which allows for positive interactions and cross breeding of ideas once such can lead to pragmatic solutions to *Nmekpahu* (human problems). Consequently, our proposed idea when applied universally will engender social cohesion in the global community.

## REFERENCES

1. Achebe, C., (1960). *No Longer At Ease*. London: Heinemann.
2. Achebe, C., (1967). *Arrow of God*. England and Wales: Heinemann.
3. Aristotle, (1983). *The Politics* translated by T. A. Sinclair. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.
4. Asouzu, I., (2007). *Ibuanyindanda: New Complementary Ontology, Beyond World Immanent, Ethnocentric Reduction and Imposition*. Vol. 20. London: Transaction Publishers.
5. Ayer, A. J., (1956). *Problem of Knowledge*. London: Macmillan.
6. Bertrand, R., (1948). *Human Knowledge, Its Scope and Limits*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
7. Chieka, I., (1979). *Traditional Humane Living Among The Igbo: An Historical Perspective*. Enugu: Fourth Dimension.
8. Gettier, E. L., (1963). "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?" in *Analysis*, Volume 23.
9. Hamlyn, D. W., (1956). *The Theory of Knowledge*. London: Macmillan.
10. Horton, R., (1961). *Three Nigerian Novelists: Nigerian Magazine* 70:218-24.
11. Ihejirika, C., (2016). *John Dewey's Instrumentalism: A Critique*. Department of Philosophy, University of Port Harcourt: Unpublished Doctoral Thesis.
12. Iwe, N. S. S., (1991). *Socio-Ethical Issues in Nigeria*. Obosi: Pacific Publishers.
13. Iwuagwu, A., (1998). *African Traditional Religion, Students Handbook*. Owerri. Ager Publishers.
14. Metu, E. & Ojoade, O., (1999). *Nigerian Cultural Heritage*. Jos: Imico Publishing Company.
15. Nwala, U., (1985). *Igbo Philosophy*. Lagos: Literamed Publications.
16. Nwodo, C., (2004). *Philosophical Perspectives on Achebe*. Port Harcourt: University of Port Harcourt Press.
17. Okoro, K. N., (2009). *Cultural Globalization, The Last Onslaught on African Personality. The Igbo Example*. *International Journal of Philosophy*. 1 (1) 33.
18. Okoro, K. N., (2010). *African Traditional Education: A Viable Alternative For Peace Building Process in Modern Africa*. *Journal of Alternative Perspectives in Social Sciences*. 2 (1) 150.

19. Ozumba, G. O., (2001). *A Concise Introduction to Epistemology*. Calabar: Jochrisam Publishers.
20. Ross, D. S., (1969). *Literature & Philosophy: An Analysis of the Philosophical Novel*. New York; Appleton Century Crofts.
21. Serumaga, R., (1967). Interview with Achebe: Smithsonian Libraries African Index Project DSI.
22. Taiwo, O. (1976). *Culture and The Nigerian Novel*: London: Macmillan.
23. *The New International Webster's Comprehensive Dictionary of English Language* (2004). Florida: Trident Press International.
24. Udoidem, S. I. (2014). *Engineering Culture For Peaceful Co-Existence And Sustainable Development in Nigeria*. Uyo: University of Uyo. A Keynote Address at the Centre for Cultural Studies Conference on Culture and Sustainable Development.
25. Uwalaka, J., (2003). *The Struggle For Inclusive Nigeria: Igbos to be or not to be? A treatise on Igbo Political Personality and Survival in Nigeria – to Nwaigbo*. Owerri, Snaap.