

COMMUNITARIANISM IN ACHEBE'S *ARROW OF GOD*

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the communitarian themes in Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God*, revealing the complex social fabric of the Igbo village of Umuaro. Through a critical analytic method, this study examines how Achebe's narrative embodies core communitarian principles: prioritisation of collective well-being, interdependence of individual and communal identity, and the contextualisation of moral agency within cultural traditions. It also examines the position of the individual as an integral part of the commune. This research argues that Achebe's work presents a culturally nuanced communitarianism, highlighting the importance of collective life, and concludes that a delicate balance must be struck between individual responsibility to the community and communal responsibility to the individual.

Keywords: Communitarianism, individual, Achebe, community, *Arrow of God*

INTRODUCTION

“Communitarianism is a social philosophy that, in contrast to theories that emphasize the centrality of the individual, emphasizes the importance of society in articulating the good.” (Etzioni, 2015, p. 1). The idea of communitarianism considers individuals as part of a community that defines their identity and their modes of existence. Thus, it is a position or tradition that emphasises the role of the community to which one belongs in defining one's realities and as an identity-giving agency. Achebe expressed communitarian ideas in *Arrow of God* by showing the relationship between the individual and community as a good number of scholars have done; only that Achebe situates these ideas in Eastern Nigeria as a brilliant and entertaining work of literature. He knits the two types of communitarianism expressed by scholars – radical or extreme communitarianism and moderate or restricted communitarianism – in the events and characters of the book, showing their merit. The present paper shall analyse the notion of communitarianism as expressed by different scholars and discuss how it is expressed in Achebe's *Arrow of God* adopting the critical analytic method.

THE NOTION OF COMMUNITARIANISM

Communitarianism is a social and political theory which emphasises that the community and individuals within it have duties to each other for the furtherance of their needs, that is to say that, for the needs of an individual to be met, s/he must play certain roles for their community; and the community's needs can be met in recognition, and the fulfilment, of the needs of the individual. Of course, every individual has duties and obligations s/he owes to their community and vice versa regardless of the operational social system. Given this, one may want to ask what distinguishes communitarianism from other social systems. It is pertinent to state clearly that communitarianism is essentially different from other social systems; otherwise its emergence as a theory would never have occurred. Communitarianism is a reaction to liberal individualism which glorifies the individual over the community or society within which s/he lives. Individualism places the individual before societal structure meant to regulate individuals within

society. This disposition of individualism necessarily brings about a tension between the individual and community/society leaving room for the evaluation or reevaluation of the role of society in the individual's life, and that of the individual to the community. As much as one may want to rule out the bearing of the community of individuals on one's life and choices, it is quite impossible to do so given that man is a social being who necessarily interacts with his fellows in society. In interacting with others, there is an inevitable onus to share certain values aimed at ensuring peaceful coexistence and human flourishing. Helen Buss Mitchell agrees with this point by expressing that, "If we see ourselves as exclusively isolated, atomic individuals, rather than as linked by shared values and goals with others in a community we share, the result may be an unhealthy society that is inhospitable to the individual." (2011, p. 433).

Communitarianism is sometimes used to mean communism, and other times, communalism; however these terms are to be conceived as different, though slightly related. Kwame Gyekye uses them interchangeably (1992, p. 102). Ifeanyi Menkiti relates communitarianism with communism. For him:

Communism we understand as a political ideology, stretching out the idea of the communal, with governance as its focus. ... Communitarianism, although it also plays with the idea of the communal, is not itself a political ideology. It could become a political movement if the right conditions arose, in which case communitarianism and communism become then one and the same thing. (2017, p. 467)

Polycarp Ikuenobe relates or compares communitarianism with communalism. He espouses that:

'Communitarianism' in philosophical literature has social-political connotations involving how a state is organized to engender a sense of common belonging and collective obligations to the state as the locus of the monopoly of force, and the prioritization of collective interests over individual rights.... 'communalism' in African traditions has a broader connotation: it is rooted in the traditions of a group of people with common kinship, aspirations, values, and beliefs, living together proximately, sharing, and organizing aspects of their lives cooperatively in a community. (2020, pp. 129-130)

For Menkiti, communitarianism is not originally a political ideology, whereas, for Ikuenobe it is. There is, however, an agreement on what is involved in a communitarian system; the idea of a communal, a commonness that exists within a communitarian society that downplays an excessive expression of the individual as an atomic self-sufficient entity. Olatunji Oyeshile points out some of the values held within a communitarian society as including "sharing resources, burden and social responsibility, mutual aid, caring for others, interdependence, solidarity, reciprocal obligation, social harmony and mutual trust." (2006, p. 104).

One may be moved to ask whether the qualities and features of care and respect for common good seen and considered as strengths and laudable aspects of a communitarian society are inexistent in atomic or liberal societies – where the individual formulates the good however they see fit. It is crucial to note that this paper does not suggest that communitarian societies are the only societies possessing these features; however, such as are found in liberal societies cannot be compared with communitarian societies. Individuals who conform to the communitarian ethos see it as second nature to extend an arm of care and friendship within the community to which they belongs, and bear the burden of others as though it were theirs; whereas those who do not

subscribe to the communitarian ethos in liberal societies show care non-obligatorily. Gyekye captures this in the following expression:

Even though such duties as caring for one another, concern for the welfare and needs of others, may not be said to be idiosyncratic to the communitarian system alone and an individualistic system can also evince or practise them, it seems to me that the pursuit of those duties in the latter system will be less spontaneous and less successful because of its obsession with individual rights. (1992, p. 117)

Menkiti observes that the conception of person in Africa is not removed from the ambit of the community. The relationship between the individual and the community is such that the individual acknowledges the role of the community in his life, informing the idea that without the community he is nothing, or that his existence is meaningless. It must be understood that this idea is not forced on the individual; rather, the individual identifies his personhood as actualised by the community. (2004, p. 324)

Communitarian ideals make provision for reciprocal relations in society, what may be termed the Golden Rule as Henry Tam notes in his book *The evolution of communitarian ideas*; acting in ways one would accommodate others to act in (2019, p. 1). Some consider it as:

[A]n ethic that accents the community as the ultimate concern, pronounce it as the criterion of truth, laud it as the source of value, and hold that its structures constitute the meaningful order for individual lives in it, secure the integrity of interpersonal interactions, and provide the foundation for communion. (Wariboko, 2020, p. 147)

This is an extreme view of communitarianism as it alludes the last word on social order and human reality to the community when in fact, the community is an aggregate of atomic individuals. Nimi Wariboko notes that African scholars who advocate communitarianism for some reason(s) tend to deny individualism in African social ethics, painting a false picture of Africa being historically communitarian. He thus disagrees that individualism was never a part of pre-colonial Africa. On this disagreement Wariboko sets the stage for the essay, “Between Community and My Mother: A Theory of Agonistic Communitarianism” According to Adeshina Afolayan and Francis Offor:

For communitarians, the entire philosophy of liberal ontology of the self together with the neutrality of the state is both dangerous and false. The philosophy is dangerous because such a market ordering of the subjective preferences of the individual, portends a serious threat to the well-being of the society itself. For instance, to take Mill's liberty principle to its logical conclusion, your personal preferences and consumptive choices may be served by your promoting the sale and distribution of fake drugs, impure bottled or packaged water, and other substandard products. However, the fulfillment and expansion of your sphere of freedom would harm many others and limit their range of options to worthwhile preferences. It will also significantly compromise the existence of future generation yet unborn. Thus, the state may have to intervene in this context with regulations and legislations to ensure the survival of the society. (2014, p. 55)

Where one is at liberty to make conscious decisions geared towards the satisfaction of one's preferences over and above such provisions as would ensure the collective growth and sustenance of society, society will inevitably disintegrate as there will be a multiplicity of opposing preferences. Kwame Gyekye (1992, pp. 103-104) and D. A. Masolo (2004, p. 495) stating their opposition to extreme/radical communitarianism note that political leaders and scholars of post-colonial Africa subscribed to extreme communitarianism which does not allow for the exercise of the rights of the individual. For Gyekye, communitarianism sees the community as:

[A] group of persons linked by interpersonal bonds, ..., who consider themselves primarily as members of the group and who have common interests, goals, and values. The notion of common interests and values is crucial to an adequate conception of community, that notion in fact defines the community. It is the notion of common interests, goals, and values that differentiates a community from a mere association of individual persons. Members of a community share goals and values. ...; as long as they cherish them, they are ever ready to pursue and defend them. (1992, p. 104)

This idea of communitarianism, known as moderate communitarianism, does not elevate the community above the individual as the individual is an integral part of the community whose goals and interests are jointly pursued by the community. It strikes a balance between the responsibility of the individual to the community and vice versa. The moderate communitarian is interested in the survival of the community within which the individual necessarily thrives, for without the individual there is no community. This is the view Wariboko fronts; a communitarianism that allows for a sort of individualism that does not pose a threat to the community. Wariboko terms this individualism a “covenantal individualism wherein the needs of the communal relationship and social justice take priority over the needs of the individual without necessarily stifling individual creativity and actualization of potentiality.” (2020, pp. 148-149). Elucidating the idea of a moderate communitarianism and showing its import and strength, Gyekye asserts that:

Even though in its basic thrust and concerns it gives prominence to duties toward the community and its members, it does not – can not (sic) – do so to the detriment of individual rights whose existence and value it recognizes, or should recognize, and for a good reason. (1992, p. 121)

ARROW OF GOD: A SYNOPSIS

In 1920s Nigeria, Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God* delves into the complexities of cultural transformation in the Igbo village of Umuaro. Ezeulu, the revered chief priest of Ulu, struggles to maintain his authority as colonialism and Christianity erode traditional practices. A bitter dispute over the harvest festival—a vital ritual ensuring communal prosperity—sets the stage for Ezeulu's confrontation with modernity. His unwavering commitment to ancient customs creates tension, particularly with one of his most vocal detractors, Nwaka.

Meanwhile, Ezeulu's son, Oduche, becomes increasingly drawn to Christianity, driving a wedge within the family, prompting him to question his father's beliefs and authority. The arrival of T. K. Winterbottom, a condescending British District Officer, intensifies Umuaro's internal strife. As

Ezeulu grapples with the rapidly shifting landscape, his mental and spiritual well-being deteriorates. His once-harmonious relationship with Ulu, the deity he serves, becomes increasingly strained. Through Ezeulu's poignant narrative, Achebe deftly explores the tensions between cultural identity, tradition, and colonialism. *Arrow of God* poses profound questions about faith, community, and the resilience of traditional values in the face of modernity. Ultimately, Ezeulu's tragic downfall symbolises the disintegration of Umuaro's cultural fabric, leaving the village vulnerable to the forces of change.

In *Arrow of God* Chinua Achebe tells the story of a community made up of six villages that came together to form an alliance to face their oppressors. Initially these villages were atomic, and independent of each other; however, for the purpose of preserving the lives – and by extension culture, tradition, and values – of their people they formed an alliance and installed a deity which would ensure an unbreakable bond needed for defeating their enemies. Although the six villages of Umuaro – Umuachala, Umunneora, Umuagu, Umuezani, Umuogwugwu, Umuisiuzo – were held together by communitarian ideals, there were in some points and certain people an expression, of what Wariboko calls “expressive individualism,” (2020, p. 148) that undermined societal ideals. Such expressions brought about certain consequences which shaped the lives of those individuals, and in some cases, determined the fate of the community.

The Igbo of South-eastern Nigeria whose history Achebe captures as fiction in *Arrow of God* are an egalitarian people who nevertheless live in what may be described as communal harmony. Given that they had no kings, their societies were democratically run. Members of the Igbo communities who had achieved certain levels of success were permitted to take up chieftaincy titles, but never to rise to the level of obtaining rule over the rest of society (Onyibor, 2016, p. 111).

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Ezeulu's contemplation of individualism is seen in his consideration of the power he wields over the people of Umuaro; that the declaration of the planting, harvesting, and festive seasons was solely in his place to do. By virtue of this he was the most important man in Umuaro, if he decides not to declare a day – say, for harvest then there would be no harvest and consequently no new planting season. No priest had done that before but thinking about the possibility of acting in that way implies the possibility of one expressing one's individuality over the community. Ezeulu's prayer to Ulu first shows individualism before a communion of the six villages. He approached Ulu first as an individual before presenting the interest of the community he represents.

In a communitarian system, it is expected that the people live in unity and solidarity and so Ezeulu was always angry whenever he had to pray for Umuaro given the division among the six villages it was composed of. Ezeulu went against the communitarian ethos of his community by sending his son – Oduche – to learn the ways of the new religion, when he was in fact, the custodian of his own people's religion (Bogers, 1989, p. 169), (Dieng, 2004, p. 10). One would consider this action as an utter disregard for the community as its priest should never have acted in that manner. Eric Sipyinyu Njeng posits that Ezeulu's ambition for power was his motivation for instructing Oduche to be diligent in his learning in order to possess mastery of the white man's knowledge (Njeng, 2018, p. 104).

Given his knowledge of the system of togetherness in the community, Obika anticipated that Ibe's kinsmen would support him so he took his friend, Ofoedu along to Umuogwugwu where he dealt a heavy hand on his half-sister's husband for beating her. It was in solidarity Ibe's kinsmen came to Ezeulu to inquire as to why their kinsman was treated so badly. They acknowledged that Obika

was justified in defending his sister given that their kinsman did not do well by her, but that he – Obika – was not justified in bundling Ibe away from his village as though he had no family who could stand up for him the way Obika stood up for his sister (Achebe, 1974, pp. 11-12).

Decisions in the community are reached by consensus and not on individual sentiment; whether or not those decisions are ill-fated or ill-informed, they are carried out insofar as the community agrees on it – individual differences give way to the voice of the community. Akukalia emphasised the place of the community in the expression: “It is not our mission to ask them any question, except the question which Umuaro wants them to answer.” (Achebe, 1974, p. 21). Hence, despite one's reservations about the community's decision or position on an issue, one is obligated to act in line with that decision or position. Despite the fact that Akukalia knows the place of the community, he acts contrary to the directives of the community expressing his individuality – for which he pays with his blood (Achebe, 1974, pp. 24-25).

After Akukalia was killed in Okperi, and his body was taken to Umuaro his action was condemned as what he did was unthinkable and unforgivable.

Let us put ourselves in the place of the man he made a corpse before his own eyes. Who would bear such a thing? What propitiation or sacrifice would atone for such sacrilege? How would the victim set about putting himself right again with his fathers unless he could say to them: Rest, for the man that did it has paid with his head? Nothing short of that would have been adequate. (Achebe, 1974, pp. 25-26)

This clearly indicates that the community considers the appropriateness of punishment for any member who disregards it. Punishment may be internal or external – external in Akukalia's case given that he suffered punishment outside his community – however, the punishment of a member of one community by another community may undermine the community whose member was punished. Umuaro was undermined as the people of Okperi offered no explanation as to the death of their kinsman – this was also the grievance Ibe's kinsmen held against Ezeulu's family when Ibe was beaten and taken away. Thus, there was a contention as to whether or not Umuaro was to wage war against Okperi, not on the account of Akukalia being killed, but instead on the account of Okperi's failure to send a message across. This contention however brought about confusion and a consequent division within Umuaro, enabling some express their individuality – since there was no communal agreement.

Disagreement, strife, enmity, between two individuals from different communities or villages is capable of influencing the relations between those communities. Each community acts in solidarity with their member as was the case of Umunneora and Umuachala due to the enmity between Nwaka and Ezeulu. For the enmity between two individuals to extend to their communities was a normal phenomenon. In fact, it would be abnormal for such rancour to not extend to the communities of the individuals concerned. As Achebe expresses it:

As was to be expected this enmity spread through their two villages and before long there were several stories of poisoning. From then on few people from one village would touch palm wine or kolanut which has passed through the hands of a man from the other. (Achebe, 1974, p. 40)

While this is so, in times of communal celebration or festivities, individual and sub-communal differences are set aside. Disputes are not allowed to come in the way of communal gatherings geared towards fostering peace and unity. Achebe notes that during the Festival of Pumpkin

Leaves, the hostility between Ezeulu and Nwaka which had extended to their villages seemed insignificant. The communitarian spirit at such times towers over every other to the extent that:

A stranger to this year's festival might go away thinking that Umuaro had never been more united in all its history. In the atmosphere of the present gathering the great hostility between Umuonneora and Umuachala seemed, momentarily, to lack significance. Yesterday if two men from the two villages had met they would have watched each other's movement with caution and suspicion; tomorrow they would do so again. But today they drank palm wine freely together because no man in his right mind would carry poison to a ceremony of purification; he might as well go out into the rain carry potent, destructive medicines on his person. (Achebe, 1974, p. 68)

It is important to note that even though in a communitarian society it is expected that people act in ways as would benefit society over and above themselves, not everyone would do things in the same way – there is bound to be differing opinions and actions as a result of the individuality of every member of that society. Edogo's recollection of his mother's account of Ezeulu's fault captures this:

[T]hat Ezeulu's only fault was that he expected everyone – his wives, his kinsmen, his children, his friends and even his enemies – to think and act like himself. Anyone who dared to say no to him was an enemy. He forgot the saying of elders that if a man sought for a companion who acted like himself he would live in solitude. (Achebe, 1974, p. 94)

The point here is that, in a communitarian society there is bound to be persons who prefer to express their individuality over the community.

The elevation of some persons in the community may make them emphasise their individuality over and above the community by lording themselves over those above whom they are elevated. This can be likened to a lawyer who is elevated to the bench – that is, made a judge – and thereafter acts as though he is superior, in learning and sound judgement, to other lawyers. Captain T. K. Winterbottom notes this tendency in his account of James Ikedi whom he had made warrant chief in Okperi.

The man was a complete nonentity until we crowned him, and now he carries on as though he had been nothing else all his life. It's the same with Court Clerks and even messengers. They all manage to turn themselves into little tyrants over their own people. (Achebe, 1974, p. 109)

In a communitarian society, guests are treated as family, such that one doesn't turn one's guest away without entertaining him; as was the case of Ezeulu and Akuebue. Admonition of children who err is not left for the biological parents alone; it is the duty of the community. The social bonds established as a result of a communitarian system makes the pain and misfortune of an individual or a family the burden of the community such that townspeople always create time to visit those who are needing of care and moral support as was the case of Amalu who was stricken with an incurable sickness that quickly saw to his deteriorated health. It must be noted that townspeople do not only share in the burden of those who experience misfortune, they also partake in the joys of those who attain a new or better social status. When Obika's bride came to

finally settle with him in his home, people from both their villages came to celebrate with them, and contributed to the setting up of the new home by bringing items – mortar and pestle, ladle, mats, bowls, palm oil, and fish among others – they considered would be useful to the couple (Achebe, 1974, pp. 113-118).

In deciding on matters, the clan, tribe, or village is considered more knowledgeable than the individual. An individual cannot be wiser than the collection of people in the community. This is reiterated by Akuebue to Ezeulu after Ezeulu emphasised his moral victory over the community in the case between Umuaro and Okperi. Ezeulu noted that everything happened as he envisaged they would, and Akuebue responded thus:

I do not doubt that, but you forget one thing: that no man however great can win judgement against a clan. You may think you did in that land dispute but you are wrong. Umuaro will always say that you betrayed them before the white man. And they will say you are betraying them again today by sending your son to join in desecrating the land. (Achebe, 1974, p. 132)

In a communitarian society, the community decides what is right; rightness and wrongness is not arbitrated by the individual. Thus, the individual must act in ways that promote the good or cause of the community even though such actions are discouraged or frowned at within the community – in Ezeulu's case, not giving an account of what he conceived as untrue. This goes to say that one could be involved in lying, killing, or any other activity considered a vice within his community insofar as it does not affect members of one's community and it serves as a way of helping the community achieve its goals.

Crucial to note is the possibility of sacrificing the life and/or luxury of an individual for the community where need arises in a communitarian society. Given that the community is considered more important than the individual – even though without the individual, the community cannot exist – it can, for the sustaining of the whole sacrifice a number of individuals. It should also be noted that the community is never in haste to sacrifice individuals in order to overcome the challenge they face or meet a particular need. The use of individuals for such ends is a last resort; for even when a human is needed to be sacrificed, they look for one outside the community, a member of the community is used when it cannot be avoided. This idea is supported by Ezeulu's exposition of how certain challenges are addressed. In his words:

A disease that has never been seen before cannot be cured with everyday herbs. When we want to make a charm we look for the animal whose blood can match its power; if a chicken cannot do it we look for a goat or a ram; if that is not sufficient we look for a bull. But sometimes even a bull does not suffice, then we must look for a human. ..., we do it because we have reached the very end of things and we know that neither a cock nor a goat nor even a bull will do. And our fathers have told us that it may even happen to an unfortunate generation that they are pushed beyond the end of things, and their back is broken and hung over a fire. When this happens they may sacrifice their own blood. This is what our sages meant when they said that a man who has nowhere else to put his hand for support puts it on his own knee. That was why our ancestors when they were pushed beyond the end of things by the warriors of Abam sacrificed not a stranger but one of themselves and made the great medicine which they called Ulu. (Achebe,

1974, pp. 134-135)

Even though the community is placed above the individual in a communitarian society, every individual is considered important. For this reason the people of Umuaro observed a retreat called *Oso Nwanadi* to appease the spirits of those who harbour resentment over losing their lives – in any way: sacrifice or war – for the sake of Umuaro (Achebe, 1974, p. 196).

When strangers visit a clansman his kinsmen who are around come to express solidarity; whatever the cause of the visit would be made known in their presence, and where the need arise that they make inputs or deliberations, they do. In the same vein, where an inquiry of or a visit to a clansman would cause embarrassment to the clansman, his clansmen and clanswomen avoid being involved in aiding the inquiry or visit. This is shown clearly in John Nwodika's pretence of being sick seeing that Ezeulu was to be arrested. He did not consider the former visit a problem since it was only a summons which could be said to be in Ezeulu's favour as he was to be made warrant chief in Umuaro, hence, he served as escort to Winterbottom's messenger without qualms. In the same way the first three people the policemen asked for direction to Ezeulu's house evaded extending help considering that the visit was not a friendly one, given their appearance. It took the threat of force to make the fourth person they asked for direction to comply after trying to be evasive like the earlier three; even so, he did not go into Ezeulu's compound with them. According to him, "It is not our custom to show our neighbour's creditors the way to his hut. So I cannot enter with you." (Achebe, 1974, p. 153) On saying this, he ran away so no one in the compound would see him and associate him with the policemen and whatever it was they were to do.

Despite the fact that John Nwodika's village, and Ezeulu's village, were not in friendly conditions; Nwodika ensured that Ezeulu was fed during his stay at Okperi waiting to see Captain Winterbottom. The inter-village strife within Umuaro did not prevent Nwodika from being hospitable to Ezeulu in a strange land – outside Umuaro. Even when Ezeulu was to send for his younger wife to come prepare his meals, Nwodika refused, insisting that his wife would be responsible for preparing Ezeulu's meals. This gesture made Ezeulu consider that warring clansmen could be friends in strange lands. The enmity between Umuachala and Umunneora caused Akuebue to be alarmed by the information that a man from Umunneora was giving his friend, Ezeulu food that he made to go to Okperi to ensure that all was well with Ezeulu. That disputes are left at home is emphasised in Nwodika's statement: "That is for the people at home, I do not carry it with me when I travel. Our wise men have said that a traveller to distant places should make no enemies. I stand by it." (Achebe, 1974, p. 169)

The community generally does not associate with those whom are blameworthy in any matter, hence, when Umuaro found that Ezeulu had no fault in his arrest they started paying him visits bearing gifts. Upon Ezeulu's release he set out for home with John Nwodika who had refused to let him embark on the journey alone. This clearly shows the support rendered by members of the community to other members, even when not solicited (Achebe, 1974, pp. 178, 183).

Given all he had suffered in his time away from home, especially since he was unable to perform his duties as Ulu's priest, Ezeulu had the intention of making Umuaro suffer, for while away he considered Umuaro his enemy with whom he was going to wage a war. However, upon his return his anger began to dissipate on account of the concern shown him during his arrest and his return. Visitors from Umunneora, the supposed enemy village also came to visit him; a gesture that shows that there must be respite even in conflict (Achebe, 1974, pp. 184-190).

In time of crisis or impending communal crisis, the people come together to resolve or prevent it. So when it was time for harvest and the Chief Priest of Ulu had not announced the day of the Feast of New Yam, his assistants – the priests of the deities of each of the six villages that made up

Umuaro – came to inquire of Ezeulu the day of the feast. Umuaro was thrown in a state of panic and confusion when Ezeulu sent his assistants away without an explanation for the delay in proclaiming the day of the New Yam Feast that men of the highest title – representing the people as leaders – paid him a visit for the same inquiry, and seek a solution to the problem where necessary in order to prevent the community's harvest from being ruined. The essence of this account is to show the role of the people in solving communal problems; no one person reserves the right to making decisions having the potential of affecting the community (Achebe, 1974, pp. 204-211).

Umuaro suffers untold hardship following Ezeulu's adherence to Ulu's 'dictates' – regarding the Feast of New Yam. His family also suffers isolation from the rest of the community owing to his unwavering position. The family was considered to be against the whole community, and so when Aneto requested that Obika performed a function in preparation for his – Aneto's – father's second burial, Obika agreed even though he was not feeling well. This agreement was to show solidarity and absolve his family from the accusation of wanting to ruin their clansman's burial. In Obika's words, “If I say no, they will say that Ezeulu and his family have revealed a second time their determination to wreck the burial of their village man who did no harm to them.” (Achebe, 1974, p. 226). Unfortunately, this solidarity cost him his life.

With Obika's death came Ezeulu's humiliation which caused his insanity. Ezeulu's fate brought about an idea in the minds of the people emphasising that the community ranks higher than the individual and that in the end the community wins.

So in the end only Umuaro and its leaders saw the final outcome. To them the issue was simple. Their god had taken sides with them against his headstrong and ambitious priest and thus upheld the wisdom of their ancestors – that no man however great was greater than his people; that no one ever won judgement against his clan (Achebe, 1974, p. 232).

To stress the point that the individual is given social status as society allows and consequent of that no one wins a wrestle with his clan, Koen Bogers states that Ezeulu's priesthood was determined by the people. He was given a responsibility which could be taken from him, and was eventually taken from him (Bogers, 1989, p. 169) when the people turned their backs on him and took their yams to the church. Ezeulu's interests as a member of the community would have been met had he not been bent on expressing his individualism in a radical manner, and by that radical expression of his individuality he brought himself to ruin. Instead of doing the will of the people he expressed his individuality over them, forgetting or choosing to ignore the fact that the people make and dispose gods as fit for their reality (Onyibor, 2016, p. 114).

CONCLUSION

Achebe's *Arrow of God* depicts a picture of communitarianism where members of the community are held together by social bonds which demand that they act in ways as would promote the ideals of the community. We find that even though they had a communal worldview they had the agency for and by which they could create and recreate themselves within the community. As with every society or group there were individuals who acted out on their own disposition without regard to community's edicts. It is our submission that, while it is important to uphold communitarian ethics or ideals, such should be done insofar as they are not self-injurious. Thus, Obika's acceptance to Aneto's appeal in spite of his poor health was ill-informed regardless of what members of the community would have said. His strict adherence to the communitarian ethics of

solidarity cost him his life. In the same way Ezeulu's expressive individualism was of no benefit to him. Communitarian ideals in any society must be moderated, covenantal – as Wariboko's calls it – if individual and the community's flourishing is to be made possible.

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