

RESEARCH PAPER

**POLITICAL MYTH AND ACHEBE'S ARROW OF GOD**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Many African states are in dire political distress. During the political struggle for freedom and the immediate aftermath of political independence, leaders were able to mobilize the citizenry on the banner of the myth of the common nation state, a veritable paradise on earth. The stark reality now is that a combination of factors has led to general disillusionment. One of the ways to rekindle mass political enthusiasm is for the political elite to fashion new myths of the state which the general populace can identify with. This paper suggests that modern leaders of Africa can learn valuable lessons from Achebe's Arrow of God. Firstly, when a nation is in a crisis, a new political myth becomes necessary. This new myth should be consciously crafted by experts brought together by political leaders. Secondly, if leaders fail to give the state a new cohesive myth, the nation may disintegrate into tribal enclaves, or even worse, any passionate fringe group will fashion a political myth – positive or negative – for the state. The paper concludes that political leaders in Africa should set the process in motion to deliberately craft new political myths for the various countries.*

**Keywords:** *political myth, crisis, nation-state, political discourse, fringe groups*

**INTRODUCTION**

Politically, economically and socially Africa is in crisis. The popular enthusiasm which followed political independence has long faded. Many political commentators have identified poor political leadership as the main cause of the numerous problems of Africa. Achebe states this in the very first sentence of *The Trouble with Nigeria* (Achebe, 1983). The result of the political crisis in Africa is felt in many spheres of life. Uroh (1999), discussing one of the effects, sees nation-building giving

way to nation-breaking in 'several theatres of human decimation in Africa': in Burundi, Rwanda, the two Congos, Sudan, Angola and Somalia. Since 1999 when Uro wrote, some of these theatres of genocide and tragedy have improved. Others like Somalia and Sudan have degenerated. Somalia is now a good example of a failed state. Uro (1999) thinks that this sorry state of affairs is due to the breakdown in the post-Independence politically legitimating myth of the common-nation-state or nation-building. Uro concludes that unless Africa is

able to '(re)discover a myth with which the political authority of the state could be justified', many states in Africa may deconstruct into primordial tribal enclaves. Indeed, he thinks this process is already under way in countries like Somalia and the Sudan where group solidarity is being evoked on the basis of myths of common descent, linguistic affinity, religious or spiritual symbolism.

The European Union touted as a super-state, run by technocrats has been shown to be based on myth. The *Journal of Common Market Studies* has devoted one special issue, Vol 48, 2010 'to explore the role of political myths in creating normative and cognitive foundations for governing in the EU'. Jones (2010) states that the European Commission website has a page called 'Euromyths', an official acknowledgement that the European Union has a mythical basis. Sala (2010) states unequivocally that 'political elites in the EU have always understood the importance and need for myths.' He concludes that 'it is not just that Europe needs to find a new story or a better way to tell it; rather, it needs to find ways for myth making about Europe to become part of political discourse.' Lenschow and Sprungk (2010), writing in the same journal, suggest that one of these new myths is the myth of a Green Europe. Jones (2010) deals with 'economic myths that surround the process of European integration' and points out that 'Europeans will have to develop a new mythology to explain and justify their process of integration.'

The burden of this paper is to discuss what African thinkers and leaders can learn from Achebe's *Arrow of God* with respect to the myth of the state or the political myth. Firstly, Achebe's novel teaches us that the myth of the state or the legitimizing myth is not discovered or rediscovered as Uro thinks but it is carefully and deliberately constructed. Our leaders should therefore set the wheel in motion to fashion new myths of the state for African states because almost all of them are in crisis. Achebe's novel also demonstrates how the po-

litical myth can become 'part of the political discourse.' Many characters in the story keep reminding us of the power of the myth of the state through iteration. And, finally, if our leaders fail in this important duty of providing us with cohesive political myths, fringe groups would take the opportunity to construct myths for the nations. Such groups like the clans and Islamists of Somalia and the Janjaweed of Sudan are the worst and they are full of passionate intensity. What happens to the state then is anybody's guess.

#### THE POWER OF POLITICAL MYTHS

'Every form of social organization,' according to Sala (2010), 'requires narratives to give it meaning and to provide a reason for being.' He contends: 'Political authority is no different and has a narrative that frames who should govern, why, how and over whom' (Sala, 2010). In this paper, we go a bit further and suggest that a political myth is a story or a set of stories that legitimizes not only political authority but the state itself.

In 1946, Ernst Cassirer, a German philosopher, theorized about the myth of the state. He explained that the myth of the state was the myth on which a state or a nation was based. It was his view that there was no great culture that was not dominated by mythical elements. According to him, in times of national crisis myths replaced rational and logical thought; society forsook rationality, which was perceived to have failed, for the comfort of traditional myths which offered the hope of mystically generated solutions. He put this dangerous return to myths down to man's 'primeval stupidity' which replaced rationality with the incoherent, capricious and irrational myth.

Since Cassirer's theory was propounded, it has generated many interesting papers and discussions. Many scholars have agreed that it is inconceivable for a nation to exist without mythology. With respect to the political myth David Bidney (Sebeok, 1958) expresses a paradox: 'An essentially intelligent being is natu-

rally superstitious and that intelligent creatures are the only superstitious beings' (Sebeok, p.18). He argues that even though the 'noble fiction' may have 'immediate pragmatic utility in promoting social faith and solidarity' in times of crisis, man's rationality requires a minimum of reliance upon myth. Appiah (1992), the Ghanaian philosopher, believes that every human, national or racial identity is based on myth. He thinks that as a scholar and a searcher after truth, race, national history and myth are useless falsehoods at best or – at worst – dangerous ones in the construction of identities. However, as 'a political animal' he is forced to admit that group identity is based on 'mystifications and mythologies' (Appiah, 1992, p.175). Armah (2006) thinks that myth is an invaluable psychosocial resource for societies that are aware that they have lost their way and are willing to make an effort to build a more lucid future. He writes: 'For a continent and a people going through our prolonged season of anomie, these insights may yet prove to be lifelines' (Armah, 2006, p.251).

Armah is in agreement with Houston (1992), a comparative mythologist, who explains that myth is of crucial importance to individuals and the society at large. Houston (1992) writes:

*Whenever a society is in a state of breakdown and breakthrough – what I see as whole system transition – it often requires a new social alignment that only the complex and comprehensive understandings of myth can bring. ... It is only the mythologically wise community that finds ways to mediate and to refocus the repressed and disacknowledged aspects of self and society. (p.5)*

The truth of this statement has been borne out in the history of many states including Hitler's Germany, Franco's Spain and De Gaulle's France. As stated above, the Journal of Common Market Studies (JCMS) has devoted one edition (2010, No 48) to the study of the power of myth to weld the European Union together

politically, economically and socially. Jones (2010) deals with economic mythology in the EU while Akman and Kassim (2010), in their paper, discuss myth and myth making in EU Competition policy.

It is quite evident that if a super-state like the EU and many other advanced countries realize the need and the power of myths to influence social and political integration then states in Africa must take issues of political myth seriously. African writers like Wole Soyinka, Ayi Kwei Armah and Chinua Achebe have written much about the need for myths in our political discourse. In this paper, we focus on Achebe's *Arrow of God*.

#### **THE MYTH OF ULU IN ACHEBE'S ARROW OF GOD:**

*Arrow of God* is the story of the genesis of the eastern region of Nigeria from an Igboman's perspective. The traditional mythological material which is central to *Arrow of God* is the myth of Ulu, a myth of the state explaining the origins both of the local deity and the confederation of villages called Umuaro. Achebe narrates the myth thus:

*In the very distant past, when lizards were still few and far between, the six villages – Umuachala, Umunneora, Umuagu, Umuzeani, Umuogwugwu and Umuisiuzo – lived as different peoples, and each worshipped its own deity. Then the hired soldiers of Abam used to strike in the dead of night, set fire to the houses and carry men, women and children into slavery. Things were so bad for the six villages that their leaders came together to save themselves. They hired a strong team of medicine-men to install a common deity for them. This deity which the fathers of the six villages made was called Ulu. Half of the medicine was buried at a place which became Nkwo market and the other half thrown into the stream which became Mili Ulu. The six villages then took the name of Umuaro, and the priest of Ulu became their Chief*

*Priest. From that day they were never again beaten by an enemy (Achebe, 1974, p.14).*

This confederacy of six villages began as independent village-states. The Ulu myth informs us that before Ulu, each village 'lived as different peoples and each worshipped its own deity' and surely, each village also had its own myth of origin in which her guardian deity was the star actor. As an example, Achebe explains in detail the myth of the largest village, Umunneora. The myth of the state of Umunneora is the myth of Idemili and its totem, the python which also has a well-developed myth.

In *Arrow of God*, we are informed that Idemili is from the sky and 'was there at the beginning of things.' According to the priest, Idemili means 'a Pillar of Water' holding the clouds in place. These two reasons – Idemili's timelessness and her crucial role in the cosmos – made the village she founded think of itself as pre-eminent in Umuaro. The python, we are told, is sacred to Idemili and is called 'Father' not only by the people of Umunneora but by all the people of Umuaro. This patriarchal reverence of the python is based on a myth which Achebe is at pains to narrate in his novel, probably because the python is such a powerful symbol, transcending the bounds of its home village and holding such powerful sway over all the other villages. It continues to enjoy this reverence long after Idemili has been superseded by Ulu. The python virtually becomes the symbol of the state such that it is the symbol the Christians fight against and finally succeed in desecrating, and not Ulu, the chief god of the state.

The 'hired soldiers' or the slave raiders of Abam present a problem which demonstrates the fact that a new myth becomes necessary when a state is in great crisis. The leaders of the villages sink whatever differences they have for the larger political health of the community. They identify the need of the society: a new political myth. In fact, they are more specific than that. They need a symbol all the people

can identify with and being a highly religious society, this symbol is a common deity. Cas-sirer (2004, p.282) advises: 'The new political myths do not grow up freely; they are not wild fruits of an exuberant imagination. They are artificial things fabricated by very skillful artisans.' In *Arrow of God*, the leaders 'hired a strong team of medicine-men.' These medicine-men prove to be skillful artisans, a bunch of metaphysical pragmatists who produce a new myth, or a charter or a constitution which is the work of genius. They so construct things that the source of the new-found strength of the community lies both in the spiritual potency of the new deity and in the unity that is forged among the villages. This unity is ritualized in a common political and religious experience with the Chief Priest as overlord of all the priests of the individual villages.

Myth theory suggests that successful myths 'need to be told and re-told in an organic fashion seamlessly becoming political discourse in a political community.' This is what theorists call myth diffusion (Salla, 2010). In *Arrow of God*, the story of Ulu is accepted by all the people of Umuaro and told and retold many times by different people. Nwaka, opposition leader and Ezeulu's arch-enemy, accepts that Ulu 'is still our protector, even though we no longer fear Abam warriors at night' (Achebe, 1974, p.28). Throughout the story, the idea of Ulu as killer and saviour is expressed many times by many people. The myth is narrated twice every year by the Chief Priest during two festivals at crucial periods in the life of the community: just before planting and just before harvest. The myth has also been worked into the structure of the novel as a charter, a refrain which is repeated many times at emotionally climactic moments in the story to excuse action or inaction. The Chief Priest cites the myth during the debate on the land dispute with Okperi to show why the people should not fight 'a war of blame' with Okperi. He also justifies sending his son to the colonial school by referring to the myth. On two other occasions, Ezeulu reminds himself of his responsibility as victim as ex-

pressed in the myth. Through these techniques of iteration and saturation, the myth is diffused through Umuaro and readers are not allowed to forget the Umuaro myth of origin.

The package of the medicine-men in *Arrow of God* includes two major festivals: the Festival of the Pumpkin Leaves and the New Yam Feast. The former is 'a ceremony of purification' celebrated just before planting and it is like the Week of Peace in *Things Fall Apart* where 'the forefathers ordained that before we plant any crops in the earth, we should observe a week in which a man does not say a harsh word to his neighbor.' The aim of this is 'to honour the great goddess of the earth without whose blessing our crops will not grow' (Achebe, 1959, p. 22). The other feast, the New Yam Feast, is a festival of thanksgiving held just before harvest. After this festival, the people are free to harvest and eat new yam.

The festivals also have a complement of rituals. During the festival of Pumpkin Leaves, the Chief Priest emerges from the shrine of his god, Ulu, dances around the market-place and does a ritual run which ends when he enters the shrine from which he emerged. This means victory over all the dangers posed in the year to the people. Then there is the scapegoat ritual in which the women of Umuaro shower pumpkin leaves on which the abominations and misfortunes of the people have been confessed at their Chief Priest. His assistants pick a few leaves for burial in the shrine while the women of the various villages in turn trample the rest of the leaves in the market square into the dust. The evils of the past year are thus buried or smashed. There are two other rituals: sighting and announcing every new moon and the ritual eating of roasted yam. These two rituals are in connection with the keeping of the cultural calendar and this crucial role is entrusted to the Chief Priest. For an agricultural society which depends on nature, the Chief Priest dare not make a mistake with the calendar and that is why there is this system of redundancy in which two rituals are used to indicate the pas-

sage of time.

The festivals and rituals bring Umuaro together in many ways. During the Festival of Pumpkin Leaves, young men from all the villages sat together and 'drank palm-wine freely together because no man in his right mind would carry poison to a ceremony of purification' (Achebe, 1974, p.66). The biggest symbol of this unity is Ulu and his Chief Priest. The other symbol of unity is the Ikolo, the ancient drum, almost as old as Ulu 'at whose order the tree was cut down and its trunk hollowed out into a drum' (Achebe, 1974, p. 69). The drummer, who had been honoured by the six villages announces the villages first 'in their ancient order' that is from the biggest and oldest to the smallest and youngest and later reverses the order from the youngest to the oldest. In the New Yam Feast, all men take a tuber of yam to Ulu from which thirteen are selected for the calendar count. When a new moon is announced, all the villagers especially children give a shout of joy and while the Chief Priest prays for Umuaro, each individual also offers a prayer. During the Pumpkin Leaves Festival, any woman without leaves in her right hand 'was a stranger from the neighbouring villages' (Achebe, 1974, p.68). The festivals and the rituals are thus a means of identity.

#### THE MYTH OF THE FIRST COMING OF ULU

Primary myths spawn derivative myths and in *Arrow of God* the myth of Ulu has a companion myth: the myth of the First Coming of Ulu. During the celebration of the Festival of Pumpkin Leaves, the ritual re-enactment of the First Coming of Ulu is performed and Achebe has given us the whole myth and we deem it necessary to quote it in full. This is the Chief Priest's confrontation with the four days of the Igbo week:

*'At that time, when lizards were still in ones and twos, the whole people assembled and chose me to carry their new deity. I said to them:*

' "Who am I to carry this fire on my bare head? A man who knows that his anus is small does not swallow an udala seed."

"They said to me:

' "Fear not. The man who sends a child to catch a shrew will also give him water to wash his hand."

'I said: "So be it."

'And we set to work. That day was Eke: we worked into Oye and then Afo. As day broke on Nkwo and the sun carried its sacrifice I carried my Alusi and, with all the people behind me, set out on that journey. A man sang with the flute on my right and another replied on my left. From behind the heavy tread of all the people gave me strength. And then all of a sudden something spread itself across my face. On one side it was raining, on the other side it was dry. I looked again and saw that it was Eke.

'I said to him: "Is it you Eke?"

'He replied: "It is I, Eke, the One that makes a strong man bite the earth with his teeth."

'I took a hen's egg and gave him. He took it and ate and gave way to me. We went on, past streams and forests. Then a smoking thicket crossed my path, and two men were wrestling on their heads. My followers looked once and took to their heels. I looked again and saw that it was Oye.

'I said to him: "Is it you Oye across my path?"

'He said: "It is I, Oye, the one that began cooking before another and so has more broken pots."

'I took a white cock and gave him. He took it and made way for me. I went on past farmlands and wilds and then I saw that my head was too heavy for me. I looked steadily and saw that it was Afo.

'I said: "Is it you Afo?"

'He said: "It is I, Afo, the great river that cannot be salted."

'I replied: "I am Ezeulu, the hunchback more terrible than a leper."

'Afo shrugged and said; "Pass, your own is worse than mine."

'I passed and the sun came down and beat me and the rain came down and drenched me. Then I met Nkwo. I looked on his left and saw an old woman, tired, dancing strange steps on the hill. I looked to the right and saw a horse and a ram. I slew the horse and with the ram I cleaned my machet, and so removed that evil' (Achebe, 1974, pp.70-71).

Ulu's mythical journey through time is symbolic of Umuaro's passage through history. The Chief Priest's confrontation with the four days of the Igbo week symbolizes the shocks brought to bear on the Umuaro confederacy and how they weather the storms. The prophetic nature of the myth is also quite evident. Umuaro could be metonymic for any African state.

On the first day, Eke, the panorama that spreads itself before the Chief Priest, in our view, expresses social conflicts with a natural image: it is wet on one side and dry on the other. The Chief Priest presents a sacrifice – a hen's egg – and he is allowed to pass, symbolizing that the society moves on without any serious disruptions. There are father/son, husband/wife, sibling and rival conflicts all over the story. Ezeulu is the central figure in these social conflicts, because he is the Chief Priest and also the hero. The implication, clearly, is that what happens to him happens in all homes and that his sacrifice and his prayers soften the blows before they come to the members of the community.

There are two manifestations of Oye, the second day: 'a smoking thicket' and 'two men wrestling on their heads.' The former, in our view, represents the Umuaro-Okperi war and the latter stands for the political contest between Ezeulu and Nwaka. Ezeulu, the Chief Priest, characterizes the war as 'an unjust war' or 'a war of blame', for, says he, the land in dispute actually belonged to Okperi, their neighbours. Nwaka through sheer demagoguery wins the hearts and minds of the elders and the people of Umuaro as a patriot and a champion

fighting to maintain the territorial integrity of the fatherland. Politics in *Arrow of God* as well as in modern Africa is like 'two men wrestling on their heads,' a jungle war with no rules at all. Ezeulu implies that man must be subordinate and subservient to the divine; Nwaka insists that the divine is an expression or an agent of the human. Their political struggle is a classic example of the dirt of modern African politics in which personal insults, saber rattling and rabble rousing are the main methods. Nwaka avers: 'I have always told people that he (Ezeulu) inherited his mother's madness.' Ezeulu counters by describing Nwaka as 'an overblown fool dangling empty testicles ... because wealth entered his house by mistake' (Achebe, 1974, p. 130).

The political difference between Ezeulu and Nwaka extends to their two villages, Umuachala and Umunneora. Umuachala, Ezeulu's village represents the minority tribe with the political influence and Nwaka's village, Umunneora the majority tribe without political power. The enmity deepens until 'there were several stories of poisoning' and 'few people from the one village would touch palm wine or kolanut which had passed through the hands of a man from the other' (Achebe, 1974, p.38). The deep-seated nature of this conflict is demonstrated when Ezeulu is imprisoned at Okperi by the white man. His warder is John Nwodika and Ezeulu is at first suspicious of him for he is from the enemy village. He refuses to eat the food John's wife provides for him until John demonstrates in many ways that he has 'a straight mind' towards him (Achebe, 1974, p.171). When Akuebue, back at home, is informed that a man of Umunneora was feeding Ezeulu, he is incredulous and very uncomfortable and travels to Okperi to satisfy himself. What finally satisfies him is a 'blood-knot' between Nwodika and Edogo, Ezeulu's oldest son (Achebe, 1974, p.168). When Akuebue later explains that 'travelling' had changed a man of Umunneora to some men from Umuachala, they are sceptical. One person comments: 'He will add foreign tricks to the ones

his mother taught him.' Another adds: 'They not only hate others, they hate themselves more. Their badness wears a hat' to which yet a third, in agreement, remarks: 'True. It is pregnant and nursing a baby at the same time' (Achebe, 1974, p.185). The enmity is endemic and goes on through to the very end of the story, and again this is a realistic portrayal of tribal and political animosities in modern Africa. Even though this is a serious problem, the sacrifice of the priest ensures that no serious disruption of society is occasioned.

When the Chief Priest encounters Afo, the third day, he feels 'that my head was too heavy for me'. In our view, this represents the internal conflict of Ezeulu, the Chief Priest. It is significant to note here that this is the only encounter where no sacrifice is offered. By this time also, the Chief Priest had been abandoned by the people and so Ezeulu encounters Afo by his own power. Achebe in the preface describes Ezeulu as 'that magnificent man' and indeed in the story he is admirable. He is the keeper of the cultural calendar which he guards conscientiously, leaving himself no margin of error. The very first paragraph reveals this side of the hero to us. He is looking for signs of the new moon and the narrator comments: 'He knew it would come today but he always began his watch three days early because he must not take a risk' (Achebe, 1974, p. 1).

He is credited with sight, insight and prescience of cosmic events, a faculty he badly needs, considering the importance of the new moon, a ritual and cosmic symbol of all emerging manifestations in the womb of time. And consider how meticulous the priest is. If I ever needed a priest, I would definitely go in for someone like Ezeulu who in the first place knows exactly when danger will come but will take precautions three days in advance. His meticulous attention to detail is further emphasized when he reckons the number of yams he has left:

*He knew there would be eight; nevertheless he counted them carefully. He had*

*already eaten three and had the fourth in his hand. He checked the remaining ones again...* (Achebe, 1974, p. 3).

The priest checks the yams three times: physically, mentally and physically again. This is again all the more commendable since he 'knew there would be eight.' The moon and the yam symbolize the cultural calendar, one cosmic and the other mundane: the one representing all manifestations in the womb of time, the other every emanation from the womb of the earth. The cosmic and mundane therefore meet in the Chief Priest and we are impressed with how he handles his responsibility as the ritual guardian.

Ezeulu is also presented as principled and broadminded, a man who can take very unpopular decisions and stick to them. He witnesses against his own people in the land case and his comment, a rhetorical question, is quite magnificent: 'How could a man who held the holy staff of Ulu know that a thing was a lie and speak it?' (Achebe, 1974, p.7). Then the hero, a traditional priest, the custodian of culture, sends one of his sons to the school of the white man of the new religion. He gives such intelligent reasons for his action that we can only describe him as broadminded. Later events show his foresight.

Achebe balances Ezeulu's magnificence with his pettiness. On the very first page of the novel, we meet a man in the twilight of life who does not accept his waning faculties and strength. 'Ezeulu did not like to think that his sight was no longer as good as it used to be...' (Achebe, 1974, p.1). When young men shook hands with him he 'tensed his arm' and the young men unprepared for this 'wincing and recoiled with pain' (Achebe, 1974, p.1) and it proved 'he was as good as any young man or better.' Quite early in the story, we catch Ezeulu musing on his power. He begins realistically and humbly: 'He was merely a watchman' (Achebe, 1974, p.3) just naming the days of the feasts but not choosing them. Then he

becomes arrogant: 'No! The Chief Priest of Ulu was more than that, must be more than that' (Achebe, 1974, p.3). He assures himself that he could refuse to name the day for the festival of the New Yam which would mean no planting and no reaping. When he eventually refuses to name the day for the New Yam Feast later, it is an unnecessary show of power and misplaced aggression wreaking vengeance on his own people instead of the white man who caused his misery. He is thus made to symbolize many leaders in Africa today who surrender 'to the irrational' in Mahood's famous phrase (Mahood, 1977) in a blatant show of power or vengeance for a personal hurt.

The fourth day, Nkwo, presents a problem couched in symbols. The manifestation is an old woman 'dancing strange steps on the hill.' We are informed in the novel that the seat of the colonial government is called Government Hill. In our view therefore, the old woman represents traditional society trying to come to terms with the new colonial dispensation. Nkwo comes with its own sacrifice – a horse and a ram. The horse is killed and the ram is used to clean the machet. The symbolisms are a bit difficult to pin down but some incidents in the novel may help us. The favourite son of the Chief Priest dies while doing a ritual run. Physically, he resembles his father and we are informed that he is the best in the ritual run he is contracted to do. In this also he is like his father who was the best when he was young. He was masked when doing the run which means that he was a spirit. Mathuray (2003) has described the person animated by the divine force as 'august and accursed, worthy of veneration and evoking horror', sacred and unclean, a mythic hero and a sacrificial victim. The horse may therefore represent a spiritual entity of a certain physical form with athletic abilities and probably the only person who fits the description is the Chief Priest himself. There is also Oduche, a son of the Chief Priest who is sent to the Christian school. The ram, in our view, stands for Oduche who is sacrificed culturally.

### THE STORY OF THE CHRISTIANS

Whether this interpretation is right or wrong, the community had a new and more serious crisis on its hands. The imprisonment of the Chief Priest for two months by the white man had thrown the traditional calendar into disarray. The New Yam Feast could not be celebrated on time and so new yam could not be harvested and eaten. The yams are therefore rotting in the ground while the people are going hungry. The disruption touches on the very survival of the community in a much more serious and cyclical manner. For all time, planting will be two months too late. Again, yams that should have gone to the Chief Priest to help in calculating the yearly calendar are being sent to the church. This happens on the fourth and last day of the Igbo week and symbolically, an era comes to an end. A new crisis like this demands the fashioning of a new political myth for the state. But the leaders are hopelessly divided and the Christians take full advantage. Let us note that at this time the Christians are only a handful and can be described as a fringe group.

They do two things: they destroy the basis of the old political myth and establish a new story. The timing of the crisis in the community is perfect for the Christians. It coincides with their harvest, a ritual of the Christians. The catechist takes full advantage of the crisis by fashioning out what amounts to a new myth – the myth of the superiority of the white man's religion:

*The New Yam Festival was the attempt of the misguided heathen to show gratitude to God, the giver of all good things. This was God's hour to save them from their error which was now threatening to ruin them. They must be told that if they made their thank-offering to God they could harvest their crops without fear of Ulu* (Achebe, 1974, p.216).

To this Moses Unachukwu adds: 'If Ulu who is a false god can eat one yam the living God who owns the whole world should be entitled to eat more than one' (Achebe, 1974, p.216). This

story is spread throughout Umuaro and the narrator's comment about its acceptance is: 'Such a story at other times might have been treated with laughter. But there was no more laughter left in the people' (Achebe, 1974, p.216). Hunger and the Chief Priest's madness help the people of Umuaro to accept the new myth. Fortunately, the colonialists and the Christians help to bring about a new political dispensation which unites a larger geographical area which later comes to be known as Eastern Nigeria with the capital at Enugu, the seat of the colonial government.

### CONCLUSION

In *Arrow of God*, there are two crises which necessitate a change in the myth of the state. The first is managed quite well because the leaders sink their differences to call for the construction of a new god and a new myth. We are informed that after the new god is created, they were never defeated by an enemy. Then there is the second crisis, during which the society is in disarray. The Christians are able to construct a new myth of the state which is largely accepted by the people. The lessons for our contemporary leaders are quite clear. In a crisis, they should get together and set specialists to work to fashion a new myth for the nation. If they fail in this task, fringe groups may construct a new political myth for the state. We see such scenarios unfolding in Somalia and the Sudan. The Islamists Al Shabab and the Janjaweed, are violent and passionate paramilitary groups in Somalia and the Sudan and are trying to create new myths for these countries.

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