

POLITICS AND LEADERSHIP IN A PANDEMIC: AN AFROCENTRIC EXAMPLE IN ACHEBE'S *ARROW OF GOD*

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Abstract

Human population sometimes comes under one form of severe health emergency or another that disrupts its people and order of living. This will usually come as a pandemic with a magnitude of impact spreading over a wide area, and affecting a large portion of the population. Currently, the year 2020 holds the global populace under siege of Coronavirus disease, commonly called COVID-19 pandemic having a sweeping fatality across continents, including, Africa. In Nigeria, the pandemic takes a toll on human lives, economy, and the livelihood of the people. In dealing with the reality of the time, there are narratives, theories and politics around the origin, cause, prevention and containment of the Virus. However, the inconveniences of the Government's preventive measures; lockdown, releases, statements and protocols on the severity of infection and fatality rate give rise to controversies and suspicion. Achebe's Arrow of God, showcases incidents of politics of power between the Chief Priest and the people of Umuaro in a period of crises. The Afrocentric experience in containing disaster proffers concerted efforts of the leadership and the people as a mitigation of unfortunate situations as presented in the text. Using the framework of conspiracy theory, this paper identifies contentions surrounding the pandemic and the impact on the people. A literary analysis of conspiracies and power play in the traditional arena espouses the

imperative for an Afrocentric approach to knowledge-sharing during such periods of crises.

KEYWORDS: *Afrocentrism, Conspiracy Theory, Containment, Coronavirus, Pandemic, Politics.*

Introduction:

In the last few months, the world was literally brought to its knees as it came under a very severe infestation of the deadly ailment: Corona Virus disease otherwise known as COVID-19. The disease broke out in the twilight of the year, 2019 from China. The corona virus quickly spread through the length and breadth of the world, sparing no continent and leaving in its wake scary fatalities. It takes on the status of a pandemic. Mohammed Adrian Shereen describes “the Corona virus disease (Covid-19) as a highly transmitted and pathogenic viral infection caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome Corona virus 2 (SARS-Cov-2), which emerged in Wuhan, China and spread around the world” (19). Giving more insight to the nature of the virus, a group of researchers led by David M. Morens in *The Journal of Infectious Diseases* believe that “the Covid-19 pandemic is among the deadliest infectious diseases to have emerged in recent history”. As with all past pandemics, the specific mechanism of its emergence in humans remains unknown.

Nevertheless, a large body of virologic epidemiologic, veterinary, and ecologic data establishes that the new virus, SARS-Cov-2, evolved directly or indirectly from a B. Corona virus in the Sarbecovirus (SARS-like virus) group that naturally infect bats and pangolins in Asia and Southeast Asia” (David M. Morens). These scientists observe that in Europe that the impact of the virus is felt and described as “an unprecedented challenge in today’s fast changing world, and we are facing it as a global society. Like climate change, it is testing our resilience in all sectors of the economy and all areas of development from public health, social protection and governance, to information sharing and economic policies” (David Morens). These challenges are the core devastating effects of the pandemic affecting every facet of human activity.

The scientists describe pandemic as:

Diseases that extend over large geographic areas for example, the 14th, century plague (the Black Death), Cholera influenza, and human immune deficiency virus (HIV/AIDs). In a recent review of the history of pandemics were categorized as trans-regional (2 adjacent regions of the world), interregional (2 nonadjacent regions) and global. In addition to geographical extension, most uses of the term pandemic imply disease movement or spread via transmission that can be traced from place to place, as has been done historically for centuries". (David M. Morens, Gregory K. Folkens, and Anthony S. Fauci).

A notable characteristic of a pandemic is its novelty, ‘‘diseases that are new or at least associated with novel variants of existing organisms, for example, antigenic shifts occurring in influenza viruses, the emergence of HIV/AIDs when it was recognized in the early 1980’s and historical epidemics of diseases, such as plague. Novelty is a relative concept, however, there have been 7 cholera pandemics during the past 200 years, presumably, all caused by variants of the same organisms’’ (David M. Morens). Pandemics are noted for their contagiousness because of the speed with which they spread from person to person. They have high rate of attack and explosive fatality that follows such as it is experienced with the ravaging Corona virus. While countries and leaders in some parts of the world earnestly show commitment and solidarity with the citizens in tackling the challenges of the pandemic, the situation in Africa is seemingly suspicious.

Report in *Africa Check*, has it that ‘‘most of the 54 countries in Africa have reported Corona virus disease cases. South Africa, one of the most developed countries has the highest number so far’’ (Africa Check). Nigeria is not left out as the virus takes its toll, leaving huge casualties and crashing economic and socio-religious activities. Bernard Kanu in *The Lancet* writes, ‘‘According to News from other countries in Africa, the situation in Lagos is almost a perfect mirror of the situation across the whole continent with the exception of a few countries (e.g Rwanda) where governments have been able to enact

effective solutions to the pandemic and provide palliative measures” (Kanu). Provision of palliative and containment strategies are very pertinent survival measures, but are perceived to be politicized by the leadership. This situation engenders strong distrust of government’s official statements and approach giving rise to counter narratives and conspiracy theories.

Conspiracy theory is described as “an attempt to explain harmful or tragic events as the result of the actions of a small powerful group. Such explanations reject the accepted narratives surrounding those events, indeed, the official version may be seen as further proof of the conspiracy” (Scott A. Reid). This explains why government’s constant publications of daily reports of deaths and new infections increase the skepticism of most Nigerians on the veracity of the reports. Proponents of these counter theories “believe that the entire Covid-19 fight is another money-making gimmick. For such individuals, “the Covid-19 pandemic has just become a cash cow and is not in Nigeria” (Titilola Obilade). There is a strong disbelief among citizens on the reality of the virus in the country. Scott Reid asserts that “conspiracy theories increase in prevalence in periods of widespread anxiety, uncertainty, or hardship as during wars and economic depressions and in the aftermath of natural disasters like tsunamis, earthquakes, and pandemics”. The level of hardship and economic recession is a catalyst to negative reception of government’s policies on the emergency situation. According to Van Prooyen and Douglas (2017), “the aim of conspiracy theories is to assign causes of significant social and political events to secret plots by powerful actors. They agree that some conspiracy theories are true; however, most are usually false alarms lacking evidential support” (Ben Collins 99). Corroborating this submission, Scott observes that “the content of conspiracy theories is emotionally laden and its alleged discovery can be gratifying”. People express personal perception and bias in their reactions to prevailing circumstances.

Government’s handling of official pronouncements increases the skepticism of the citizens. “Those who tend to believe in conspiracy theories do not get their news feed from mainstream media. They believe the mainstream media is government’s tool and

will not give accurate information” (Titilola Obilade). The increased suspicion in the minds of the people led them to:

Question the existing apparatus on ground including government’s operation of the isolation wards, debacle of the “Chinese doctors” brought to Nigeria, sharing of minion-size palliatives, reports of a fish bone from the throat and being branded a Corona virus case, stories of monies changing hands to have one’s name written in a Covid-19 ward, hospital staff being told that they would receive money if they can claim that they have a COVID-19 Patient” (Obilade).

These and similar stories inflame conspiracy theories, hyping the feeling that the leadership is deceiving the general public.

Achebe’s *Arrow of God* has flashes of distrust between the leaders and the people giving rise to conspiracies and counter narratives. Ezeulu, the Chief Priest of Ulu, represents traditional leadership in a power tussle with the subjects who question certain decisions and policies found debilitating, making them come out with conflicting narratives. M. J. Melamu in “The Quest for Power in Achebe’s *Arrow of God*” while, explaining the issue of trust and conspiracies between the Chief Priest and the people observes that “Ezeulu is persistently haunted by the fear that his traditional power may be challenged if not invalidated by those who should rightly do him homage. This fear inevitably engenders in Ezeulu an inordinate desire to assert his authority at every conceivable opportunity, particularly when he suspects that it is being called in question by his enemies both divine and human” (225). This observation opens up issues of dissenting opinions and countering of such narratives among people in the community.

So much is already known about the origin, transmission, and the effects of Covid-19 on humans. Scientific Researches have been undertaken such as the one with the theme, “Covid-19 Pandemic: Examination of the Faces of Spatial Differences in the Morbidity and Mortality in Sub-Saharan, Africa, Europe and Asia”. This quantitative research compares Covid-19 confirmed cases and death in countries of Africa; Nigeria, Ghana and South Africa with those reported in the more developed countries (Italy, Spain, UK, Sweden and USA) with

better health care system. It investigates the trend in spread of Covid-19, similarities and disparities in countries of Africa and determines the underlying reasons for the variation. Findings of the research suggest that “although several factors have been reported to aid the dispersal and transmission of Covid-19 across the globe, temperature remains a strong factor of the transmission efficiency ... suggesting that the Covid-19 like, the flu disease category thrives better in low temperatures” (Med Rxiv). However, this research and other fact checks on Covid-19 have not dealt on the issues of conspiracy theories arising from the conflict of understanding and distrust between the leaders and the citizens. Using the frame work of conspiracy theory this paper makes a literary and qualitative analysis of the semblance of play of politics during emergencies that throw up leadership inefficiency and lack of transparency. The paper highlights the Afrocentric issues of leadership with particular example of textual narratives of the impact of decisions and counter decisions on the citizenry. The study indicates that situations of pandemic and emergencies can better be contained with a combined effort of the leaders and the people by laying bare the true picture surrounding the issues.

Conspiracies and Afrocentric Experiences

Distrust and suspicions have always come with their effects which are most times negative, emergency situations are not spared. Conspiracies and counter narratives become rife even in such emergency situations as the pandemic. Leaders and the led are usually at each other's wits end, countering issues and strategies as it affects them. The impact of the altercation surrounding the containment of the Corona virus pandemic has been counter arguments by the citizenry against the reliability of government's statements and figures. They do not feel sufficiently satisfied with official national statistics and efforts and so they come out with stories that suit their perception as can be described as conspiracy theories. Commenting on this trend in containment of the pandemic, Paul Adepogu writes that “the absence of accurate data across the country limits Nigeria's ability to tackle the Corona virus. Linked to this, the politicization of the pandemic and a lack of institutional and public collaboration are

emerging as key challenges” (Adepogu). There is obvious fear that government plays politics with the truth surrounding the pandemic as they do not sound convincing in their statements.

It is no more in any doubt the existence of this disease, as the concomitant fatalities are there as regrettable realities, even the global lockdown. Yet, there are voices and narratives that rather believe that there are untold truths by the government concerning the virus. The play of politics erroneously portrays it as a social activity merely existing among people as it is with the leaders and the citizenry concerning the present pandemic. Aristotle describes politics as a “Master science that is nothing less than the activity through which human beings attempt to improve their lives and create the good society” (1). But he recognizes the disagreement that lies at the heart of politics noting that “it extends to the nature of the subject and how it should be studied. People disagree about what it is that makes social interaction “political”, whether it is where it takes place (within government, the state or the public sphere generally), or the kind of activity it involves (peacefully resolving conflict or exercising control over less powerful groups)” (1). These are not lacking during pandemic quagmire even as is presently, with the citizens disagreeing or not agreeing with the government thus giving rise to variants of narratives regarding the true nature of the impact of Covid-19 in the country.

The argument about the Covid-19 engendered by distrust is as global as the spread of the disease. At the onset of the disease reported in Wuhan, China, the world population went berserk with accusations against China’s intention to depopulate the world and dominate world economic power by the release of this virus said to be laboratory manufactured. These accusations were hiked by the fact that China was initially in denial of any such virus nor the intention to depopulate the world. Further assertions indicate that “the Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in misinformation and conspiracy theories about the scale of the pandemic and the origin, prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of the disease” (Wikipedia). Amjed Jaaved in an essay “Covid-19 and Conspiracy Theories: A Chinese Virus or a Bio-weapon?” notes that “United State’s President Donald Trump thinks that Covid-19 is a “Chinese Virus”. Conspiracy theories are making rounds that the virus

was compounded in a Wuhan laboratory. Several American politicians, such as Senator Tom Cotton, suggest that “the Corona virus is a bio-weapon leaked from the Wuhan Institute of Virology” (Modern Diplomacy). There are several other conspiracies over the origin of the virus, and even against the United States President who had blamed the outbreak on the China’s lack of transparency. Joe Macaron, a Washington DC based expert in U.S International Relations told Arab News:

Trump called it the Chinese virus. And Beijing accused the U.S of fabricating the virus to curb its rises as a global economic power. This is expected in an election year. Trump does not want to take direct blame for the growing unemployment, the crash of the market and all the other economic implications of the Corona virus. He needs a narrative that absolves him of any mistake, but rather to protect the fact that it was something that came from the outside. And China is an easy scapegoat, regardless of what science might say or not”.

Some scientists have come up with other stories, describing the virus as “bioterrorism” and some as the “coming of the anti-Christ”. Back home Nigeria is awash internally generated conspiracy theories. Titilola Obilade writes that “there is no hierarchy in this plethora of theories. These home-spawned versions conclude that the Corona virus does not exist, that it is a hoax and that our government is not telling the truth”. This theory to a wide extent finds acceptance with the people who still spread and adopt the narrative, refusing to adhere to the safety protocols. Obilade supports this assertion saying that “compared to countries like Brazil, they have not been shown videos of grave yards where those that died from Covid-19 are being buried. They buttress their points that the state governments started increasing the number of their Covid-19 cases “to increase their access to Covid-19 funds” (The Guardian Newspaper).

The launch of the 5G network in Nigeria sparked off another version of speculation and fear among the people, including religious leaders and some highly placed individuals. Leading this narration on the health challenges posed by the 5G network is Pastor Chris

Oyakhilome, the founder of Believers Love World, a.k.a. Christ Embassy, who raises doubt about the safety on human health and environment. Ben Collins Emeka Ndinojun captures verbatim Pastor Chris' claim that "With the global lockdown in place to forestall the spread of the novel Corona virus, the lockdown of Lagos and Abuja was to enable the Nigeria government put in place 5G infrastructure. What led to the deaths in Wuhan was not Corona virus, but 5G, and claimed that there is a global deception of the global population to the true situations the world was dealing with" (Collins Ndinojun 102). He further states that he was opposed to 5G because of its perceived health risks and the seeming silence of authorized regulators to speak on its merits and demerits" (103). The Federal government responded to the fears about the 5G, saying that "there was no correlation between 5G technology and Corona virus. It also informed that there was no deployment of 5G in Nigeria presently (104). This explanation does not go down well with the proponents of this claim as more voices joined in condemning the introduction of the 5G network as it was believed it would become a weapon against the people. A former government minister and government critic, Chief Fani Kayode supports Chris' assertion and, "praises his courage in speaking up against the forces of evil determined to introduce 5G that would lead to the coming of the anti-Christ" (103). Senator, Dino Melaye sees "5G being bad for the society, described 5G as a killer and must be resisted by the public" (104). The sense in the conspiracies is situated in the lack of transparency in communication between official government statements and the people. The height of distrust in the 5G network relating to the health of the people is "expressed by more than 180 doctors and scientists from 36 countries in an appeal to the European Union, warning about the dangers of 5G rollout, which will lead to an increase in involuntary exposure to electromagnetic radio" (100). These variant theories are the result of the lack of understanding between the 5G regulators and the citizenry. The key issues manifesting with the conspiracies surrounding 5G rollout is "lack of synergy in communication between the network providers and government on the one hand and the general public and stakeholders in the communication business on the other hand" (Collins 105). This spews distrust and lack of confidence in official

government policies. Gaps in information and lack of transparency will also fuel conspiracy” (Obilade). These communication gaps can be contained with a greater synergy among the concerned elements.

Achebe’s *Arrow of God* showcases the tug of war that manifests between the traditional leaders and the people, given situations of conflict of understanding. Such conflicts usually manifest as a power play and politicization of issues of power and authority. Described as an afrocentric experience is described as “a cultural and political movement that believes that Africans worldview should positively reflect traditional African values”. Afrocentrism is an effort for Africans to break roots from the dominating influence of civilization and culture. Gerald Early states that “according to Afrocentrism, people of African descent need to develop an appreciation of the achievements of traditional African civilizations, indeed they need to articulate their own history and their own system of values”. The call for promoting African values and remedies is sacrosanct in the face of the ravaging pandemic in order to curb the spread and avert further loss of human life.

In his submission, Mambo Ama Mazama, writing on “Afrocentricism and African Spirituality” says, “the ultimate goal of afrocentricity is the recovery of African freedom and creativity”. He insists that “it must inform our approach to everything, walking, running, loving, eating, working, and so forth” (218). The African centeredness is brought to the bare in the dialogic approach of the elders in *Arrow of God* as Mambo Ama Mazama states that “the author seeks to argue in support of the African ontological view as a valid way to view the world ... A central role in Afrocentric philosophy ought to be the re-establishment of the process by which Africans arrive at spirituality” (218). The Afrocentric philosophy is not devoid of contradiction or conflict. The leadership of African Traditional Communities come under attack as exemplified in the imbroglio between the Chief Priest and the elders of Umuaro leading to the crash of the leader, Ezeulu. To this regard, M. J. Melamu observes that in *Arrow of God* Ezeulu “thinks that the real battle is with his own people, not with the white men, the British Colonialist and Christian Missionary of all, and although he sees Nwaka as challenging the authority of Ulu, and the people spitting on him

(Ezeulu), saying he is the priest of a dead god, Ezeulu still hopes for revenge not on the colonial or Christian figures but on his own people, ..." (Okike 52; 72). This assertion spews of controversy and conspiracy. The opposing voices such as Nwaka, Ezeidemili counter Ezeulu's power and statements at critical community decisions. For example, elders visited Ezeulu to ascertain the truth concerning the new yam festival and in their agitation and bewilderment they queried the decision of Ezeulu in withholding the eating of the new yam that will usher in the new moon, they said to him, "the story we have heard is that there is a little disagreement about the next New Yam Festival ... we do not know if it is true or not, but we do know that there is fear and anxiety in Umuaro which if allowed to spread might spoil something ..." (*Arrow of God* 206). The fact of disagreement breeds variant narratives, suspicions and conspiracies.

It is obvious that Ezeulu as the traditional leader is not transparent in his dealings with his people. He politicizes the eating of the new yam and refuses to announce the new moon because of his secret desire for vengeance regarding his imprisonment in Okperi. With this singular decision, "the people are horrified at Ezeulu's irrational and outrageous decision. If they wait three months before they are allowed to harvest their crops, the crops will be ruined and the people of Umuaro will suffer widespread famine as a result" (Ahmed Kabir 13). Ezeulu failed his people because of his personal interest and power play. The damage that befalls him personally by the death of his son Obika, and Umuaro by the loss of their god to the foreign God would have been averted with transparent communication and communal understanding.

The Afrocentric value of oneness and unity of purpose is lacking in the scenario of solving the issue of the new yam festival. Like Marcel Ikechukwu Sunday Onyibor States, the first important society, which Achebe exposed in Ezeulu ... is the priestly role of keeping the community alert to changes in nature. This was demonstrated in Ezeulu's priestly function as watchman to see and announce the new moon to the community. This duty is so important and ritualized, to the extent that even his obi was built to enable him perform this role without hitches" (112). The consequent ruin and devastation at the end of the narrative in the text should be the

propulsion of African leaders to learn to show transparency in their official handling of the Corona virus pandemic. This is very pertinent if success is expected in the fight against the spread of the infection. As stated by Chinwe Ochu the Acting Director of Prevention, Programmes and knowledge at the Nigeria Center for Disease Control that “Conspiracy theories that have cropped up due to lack of trust in the government poses a big challenge to the fight against Covid-19”. Citing lack of trust in the government as part of the challenge facing the NCDC, she added “but we had to move away from that to the bottom-up approach by engaging the communities to develop their risk messages and we have discovered that this is more impactful, people want to take charge of the situation themselves” (Ochu). The citizens are to be engaged in the strategies in the fight against the pandemic as they are equally affected.

The Pandemic and the Afrocentric Example

The corona virus disease is a strange phenomenon which eruption is likened to the invitation of Ezeulu, the Chief Priest to Okperi to see the Whiteman. It is a strange visit, owing to the fact that the urgent demand of the message has not been heard in the land of Umuaro. This equates to the onset of the Corona virus in Nigeria. As sudden as the index case surfaced in Nigeria was the call for immediate lockdown of every sphere of activity in the country. Therefore, it is known that “as soon as the messenger and his escort left Ezeulu’s hut to return to Okperi the Chief Priest sent words to the old man who beats the giant *Ikoró* to summon the elders and *ndichie* to an urgent meeting at sunset” (*Arrow of God* 140). This beating of *Ikoró* and summon to an emergency meeting are sudden incidents with no known signal. This development keeps the elders perplexed and speculating on the reason for the call. The suddenness of the outbreak of the virus globally and its entry into Nigeria creates a similar agitation. So that whatever it was, the calls were immediate “for the *Ikoró* was not beaten out of season except in great emergency ...” (141). The pandemic is a global health emergency as could be likened the invitation of the white man which consequently resulted in the disaster that befalls Umuaro. The global lockdown forced on nations was precautionary, predicated on the speed at which the virus was

spreading, came as a result of the magnitude of the virus and this step excites narratives and counter narratives.

Ezeulu as the leader in the traditional arena sounds the Ikoro and relays the message with seriousness, and to show this, “the meeting was at night meeting, “had it been a day meeting children who had brought their father’s stools would have been playing on the outskirts of the market place, waiting for the end of the meeting to carry the stools home again. But no father took his child to a night meeting” (*Arrow of God* 141). This explains the severity of the issue at hand. While addressing the people of Umuaro, Ezeulu shares his fear of the unknown, and the consequence of the visit and invitation by the white man. With the concern that it is a communal affair, he says, ‘but I was taken by sunrise and as you know the unexpected beats even the man of valour’. Then he told them the story of the court messenger’s visit to him. My kinsmen, he said in conclusion, that was what I woke up this morning and found” (142).

Ezeulu, thinking he lays bare the problem to the people as a leader, instead excites criticism and doubts. Thus, government blueprint on the level of infection of Corona virus excites skepticism and agitation as is the case with the elders of Umuaro who after listening to the Chief Priest come up with their theory. One of such with a different narrative is Ezeulu’s arch rival, Nwaka who piped on Ezeulu’s submission saying “it seems to me that Ezeulu has shaken hands with a man of white body, with the white man and should bear the burden” (143). He tells him “you tied the knot, you should also know how to undo it, you passed the shit that is smelling, you should carry it away” (144). The air around the meeting and issue of discourse is of distrust, uncertainties and conspiracy. Nwaka and some elders are critical of Ezeulu’s message and advise him to take care of his situation. They played politics of self-ego by carefully putting it back to Ezeulu. While on his side, Ezeulu asserting his authority and superiority bluffs his rivals and assures them of his capability to deal with the situation. He reminds them:

Now, as for what I shall do I had set my mind on it before I asked Ikoro to summon you. But if I had done anything without first speaking to you, you might turn round and say why did he not tell us? Now I have told

you and happiness fills my mind. This is not the time for many words. When the time comes to speak we shall all speak until we are tired and perhaps we shall find then that there are orators in Umuaro beside Nwaka. For the present I salute you for answering my call (*Arrow of God* 145).

This incident opens the door for power play as both sides open up arguments favourable to them. This constant doubt and rivalry form part of politics of leadership and following.

Such counter narratives colour the debate, doubt and narratives on the government's directives on the reality and containment of Corona virus in Nigeria and other African countries. Unfortunately, citizens are suspicious of Government's intentions concerning the containment protocol of the pandemic. In the same way, the traditional festival of the New-Yam in Umuaro over which Ezeulu presides has its observable set of protocols:

This feast was the end of the old year and the beginning of the new. Before it, a man dig up a few yams around his house to ward off hunger in his family but no one would begin the harvesting of the big farms. And, in any case, no man of little would taste new yam from whatever source before the festival. It reminded the six villages of their coming together in ancient times and of their continuing debt to Ulu who saved them from the ravages of the Abame (201-2).

These set of rules are binding on the people as the tradition and aimed at maintaining order among the people. However, the issue of the new yam creates a debacle of conspiracies as Ezeulu refuses to announce the appearance of the new moon which is expected to set the activities for the festival in motion. The people look up to Ezeulu with expectation for this announcement, for their anticipated freedom. Agitated and very anxious, they come to inquire from the Chief Priest saying: "It is now four days since the new moon appeared in the sky; it is already grown big. And yet you have not called us together to tell us the day of the New Yam feast" (203). This confrontation perhaps sets the spark for the controversies between the Chief Priest and the leaders of his six villages. This misunderstanding would later

degenerate into a conflict of trust, and narratives and arguments as to who is right and who is wrong.

Perhaps what triggers the conspiracy is the show of insensitivity to the plight of the people occasioned by the withholding of the announcement of the new moon. This situation is strange in the land of Umuaro as “at first people were completely stunned by it, they only began to grasp its full meaning slowly because it’s like had never happened before” (*Arrow of God* 205). This situation in the land leaves similar shivers in the people as it is the case of the fear of the pandemic in Nigeria. Ezeulu’s refusal to announce the new moon is strange just like the infection of the Corona virus is. In the bid for palliative and to avert the impending doom that can be occasioned by hunger on the people, the elders and titled Chiefs visit Ezeulu for dialogue and “to find out what is true and what is not from the only man who can tell us” (206). Unfortunately, the Chief Priest plays politics by his obstinacy in withholding the truth from the elders. This action consequently paves way for hunger and economic devastation in his community. He insists, “I only call a new festival where there is only one yam left from the last. Today, I have three yams and so I know that the time has not come” (207). Ezeulu is not transparent in his dealings with his people, and is not forthcoming with information which predicts doom for him and his community. His refusal to adapt to the new normal elicited a tough stance from his people who now direct him, “to go and eat those remaining yams today and name the day of the next harvest.... If Ulu says we have committed an abomination let it be on the heads of the ten of us here” (208). The people of Umuaro try to navigate through the problem that is already leaving them forlorn with hunger, as nobody wants to go against the laid down protocols, or to breach the stand of the Chief Priest. Ezeulu tactically, insists on punishing his people by playing politics of superiority as a leader against helpless citizens.

Ezeulu’s uncompromising stand invariably gives diverse other theories as are raised by the elders who express the fact of change against a custom that injures its people, with “examples of customs that had been altered in the past when they began to work hardship on the people, even in the matter of taking titles, there had been a change” (*Arrow of God* 209). Hunger is already spreading down to

every segment of the community not just at the level of men who must not harvest their yams until the new moon is pronounced. The inconveniences are gaining more widespread. Just like a pandemic, there are other levels of disease spread like epidemic that do not have the potency of widespread effect, as rightly put here that “... there had been other disagreements of more or less weight before it but none of them had quite filtered down to the ground to the women and even the children – like the present crisis. Even children in their mother’s belly took sides in this one” (210). This creates unpalatable impact in semblance of a pandemic, being strange and will spread to so many groups of individuals with multifaceted effects on the economy, lives and general welfare of the people. The conflict portrays the Chief Priest as an enemy to the people, just like the people feel no sense of satisfaction nor are they comfortable with the government which they perceive as the one who “almost overnight had become something of a public enemy in the eyes of all and, as was to be expected, Ezeulu’s entire family shared in his guilt. His children came up against it on their way to the stream and his wives suffered hostility in the market” (211). These incidents mirror similar situations with government and its agencies that come under hostility from the citizenry. Much as Ezeulu maintains that Ulu has not directed his eating of the yam, the people have the view that Ezeulu is on a revenge mission “because the six villages allowed the white man to take him away. He has been trying to see how he could punish Umuaro and now he has the chance” (213). This conspiracy theory is a counter to Ezeulu’s story.

Concerning the pandemic in Nigeria, the situation is replicated in which the government and the people are in conflict with trusting the other on issues of the number of infections and safety protocols. The people do not trust government with the figures it reels out daily across the states. They see so much politics playing out in these daily briefings, and so debunk the figures on deaths and patients in treatment centers. They accuse the government of falsehood and the state governments as being only interested in the Covid-19 relief funds being disbursed by the Federal Government. Early enough at the outbreak of the disease in Nigeria, there is the disbelief among the people of its existence. The BBC reports that “Despite the cases of

Corona virus being on a rise across Africa, in some countries people don't believe the pandemic is real. Fake news and mistrust in the government means a lot of Nigeria's population thinks the pandemic is a hoax but the hospitals in the capital Lagos tell a different story" (Yemisi Adegoke). A lot of conflicting narratives abound concerning the rate of infection and containment procedures as being propagated in the news media. But Obilade is of the opinion that "the mainstream news media must do more to promote accurate information and reduce sensationalism in news reporting. The people must be better informed in visual, science and health literacy". Ben Collins Ndinojuo observes that "nothing fans the flames of conspiracies than during uncertainties occasioned like those we are witnessing. This occurrence is exceptionally dire due to the paucity of reliable scientific unanimity on the spread, containment and long term social and economic effects of Covid-19 on the society" (99). Covid-19 creates uncertainties and anxiety in the polity. Citizens are agitated and afraid of the ravaging impact of the virus, though there are considerable evidence of disbelief based on the mode of handling by the government and so giving rise to conspiracies or alternative statements. Most people believe that "the global lockdowns put in place to check the spread of the virus towards the end of February 2020, has led to governments usurping political and economic powers, businesses, have been shattered with threats of arrest for those who attempted to break the imposed shutdowns" (Ben Collins 99). The lockdown that places restriction on human freedom presents the point of conflict between the leadership and the people, and against the efforts of the government. Fidel Abowei thinks that "of anything Covid-19 exposes the perennial weakness of Nigeria's institutional and governmental structures at all levels, as well as the precarious state of its nationhood" (E-International Relations).

The afrocentric experience of the effect of the pandemic indicates the distrust in the citizens about government's handling of the situation. The people become vulnerable to the hunger, scorching economic hardship, death, and insecurity, as a result of inconsistencies in the government containment procedures especially in the area of palliatives to assuage the biting and difficult period. This is partly because "Federal, State and Local government authorities are unable

to provide economic palliatives for citizens who mostly operate on the fringes of the mainstream economy. In fact, measures devised to provide palliatives lacked transparency and spread, which in part explains resistance to lockdown measures” (Abowei). Lack of transparency is identified as the missing link in containment of global disasters such as the pandemic. Similarly, in the traditional African setting as it is presented in the text of Achebe, lack of transparency plays a major role in the disastrous end of the Chief Priest. Ezeulu withholds the truth of the situation from the people. In fact, he is on a secrete revenge mission against his people while he presents to them rather fake news that *Ulu* has not given him the go-ahead to eat the yam. Ezeulu’s actions and mis-actions dictate the end of the uncertainties. The Afrocentric experience in *Arrow of God* when placed side by side the government’s handling of the pandemic indicates transparency as paramount to counter the effect of the virus infestation.

Conclusion

The global impact of pandemic is mainly fueled by conspiracies and distrust of leadership accused of being economical with the truth in their intent and purpose on the managing of the spread of the infection. There are indeed conflicts and variations in belief and perception on the policies put in place for the fight on Covid-19. “However, in the face of contextual disparities compounded by severe structural deficits, these policies have been difficult to implement. Not unlike most countries across the global South, economic security has indeed gained primacy over health security in Nigeria and rightly so” (Abowei; Fidel). The United Nations Development Program (UNDP), says that “every country needs to act immediately to prepare, respond and recover”. Power play or playing politics underrates any genuine effort the government has made. “The Nigerian Center for Disease Control, NCDC, has been working hard to ramp up testing capabilities across the country since the start of the pandemic but cannot control who is tested or what happens to the samples” (Adepoju). This smack of government negligence. However, the Director General, NCDC, Chikwe Ihekweazu, states that “the most important tool as far as the pandemic is concerned is citizens’

compliance with the preventive measures” (Adepoju). In the areas of palliatives and lockdown measures, citizens are suspicious of government’s good intentions. The people complain that “measures devised to provide palliatives lacked transparency and spread, which in part explains resistance to lockdown measures” (Fidel, Abowei). People cry against failure of adequate infrastructure and palliative as strategies to contain the pandemic. The truth is that “fundamentally, our leaders must be fair, just and transparent in their duties. Gaps in information and lack of transparency will also fuel conspiracy” (Obilade). Government must hype up the information mechanisms and act more transparently and proactively to reach out to all regions of the country with palliatives to assuage hunger and economic crash which are the two major effects of the lockdown.

The example of the impact of the incident in Achebe’s text where there are hunger and deaths in Umuaro and eventual dementia suffered by Ezeulu give rise to total denigration of the cult of Ulu deity and usurpation of power by the white missionaries, who welcome the people to the church with yam offering and encouraged them to eat the yam. Isidore Diala observes that “Ezeulu’s delay of the celebration of the New Yam Feast hands over the initiative to the Christian Church, which offers immunity to Umuaro people through the harvest thanksgiving” (44). Of note, “we could thus say that the native leaders such as Ezeulu and Ezeidemili lack the essential traits of emotional stability for building community trust, cultural and ideological consistency and dependable loyalty to the community apart from the lures of self-interest” (Kabir Ahmed 75). The traditional authority crumbles and the community suffers chaos due to the poor handling of the delicate situation by Ezeulu.

Concerning the Nigerian situation, it is observed that “despite the infrastructural and institutional weaknesses bedeviling Nigerian’s response to Covid-19, the country still stands to make the best of a bad situation by projecting an image of a country addressing the deficits to tackle the greatest challenge of our time” (Abowei). The Afrocentric approach which projects African values in the containment of the pandemic must avoid the example found in the text. Covid-19 pandemic must be contained by a concerted effort of both the government and the people. These traditional leaders have not been

good examples of transparent leadership that solves community-based problems.

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