

# READING CHINUA ACHEBE'S ARROW OF GOD AS IGBO SPECULATIVE FICTION

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## *Abstract*

*The second quarter of the twenty-first century, moving forward towards a viable African future repositioned on its traditional foundations, calls for a speculative approach in African literature discourse. It is time to forage into African cosmology in the quest for progress towards a desirable African future, as advanced technological knowledge impacts social media, literature, science, culture, the economy, politics, value systems, and more. Generally speaking, speculation fiction genre goes beyond realism to include aspects of science fiction (Sc-fi), the supernatural, imaginary, fantasy, futurism, and more. Rereading Arrow of God with a speculative lens Chinua Achebe's this third canonical novel of The African Trilogy, Things Fall Apart, No Longer at Ease, and Arrow of God, on the Igbo world can unearth usable materials for continually rebuilding a robust and plausible Igbo future. Because authorial license allowed Achebe less than a rigid adherence to how he depicted people, places, and events, his literary imagination profited from this to challenge the boundaries of the human and divine, real and surreal, and possible and unknown universes. These are the domain of the speculation fiction genre. Arrow of God won the ever-given Jock Campbell Statesman Prize for African Writing! In 2022, Arrow of God was selected as one of 70 books on the "Big Jubilee Read List" to celebrate the Platinum Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth 11! A few questions come to mind in this forage into Arrow of God as speculation fiction. First, what was the power dynamics in the Umuaro community? Second, how did the people exert power in deciding their god Ulu's actual wish for their community over above their Chief Priest Ezeulu's dictates? Third, what were the traditional rituals and rites inherent in the Igbo natural and supernatural worlds in Arrow of God? There are only some of the many questions that this exercise in literary criticism shall seek to answer in reading Chinua Achebe's Arrow of God as Igbo speculative fiction.*

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## INTRODUCTION

African cosmology offers deep insights into human presence in the realms of existence; the essences of family, community, and the interconnectedness of all creatures, both living and non-living, the ancestors, and rites and rituals that call for respect and tolerance for everything in nature and the supernatural. Igbo culture is, of course, implicated in this general definition of African values and worldview. Ikechukwu Anthony Kanu defines African Cosmology answering his question by saying that “it is simply the way Africans perceive, conceive and contemplate their universe; the lens through which they see reality, which affects their value systems and attitudinal orientations; it is the African’s search for the meaning of life, and an unconscious but natural tendency to arrive at a unifying base that constitutes a frame of meaning often viewed as *terminus a quo* (origin), and as *terminus ad quem* (end). This cosmology is the underlying thought link that holds together the African value system, philosophy of life, social conduct, morality, folklore, myths, rites, rituals, norms, rules, ideas, cognitive mappings, and theologies.”<sup>1</sup>

Igbo cosmology includes the belief that our world, or the universe, has evolved over the ages to the one we live in now and will continue to evolve, as cosmic evolution is ongoing. A pantheon of higher and lesser deities, with Chukwu or Chineke at the highest point of the spiritual realm, controls this cosmos and the spiritual realm of spirits (*ndi nmo*), ancestors (*ndi ichie*), and gods (*ndi alusi* or *umu agbala*). This knowledge has given strength to the saying that the Igbo person is deeply religious, given that he or she is constantly in negotiation with the universe, the cosmos, from cooking meals in the kitchen all the way to conception and child-birth, working on the farms, and more. It is a question of balance and duality, natural and supernatural worlds, seen and unseen or parallel universes, and of masculine and feminine forces. In one word, everything is interconnected in the Igbo (read African) universe, or cosmos, including spirit beings, animate human beings and animal beings, and inanimate beings such as rocks and sand. Furthermore, the rich and complex Igbo cosmology centers on the concepts of ‘Chi’ and ‘Eke’.<sup>2</sup> Chi, often taken to mean one’s personal god (*Omye kwe chi ya ekwe*), animates an Igbo person’s universe, is her or his destiny as it unfurls throughout the days of one’s life. *Eke* complements *Chi* by assigning to each individual, at birth and at death, an inherent individuality inherent in his or her destiny, thus clearly demonstrating the notion of duality in Igbo cosmogony.

But how does one explain the story arc of *Arrow of God*, including why the Chief High Priest of Ulu, Ezeulu, refused to be warrant chief, leading to the disruption of the calendar of the community? Was it because of a personal or human failure (hubris) of pride and arrogance that he refused to begin the New Yam Festival after he observed the moon, leading to failed harvest, famine in the land, the people's revolution against him, and his ultimate demise in office? No man alone can fight a community of humans and spirits and win, the novel tells us. It was unfortunate that Ezeulu was resisting the incursion of a foreign power into his domain, but that was immaterial to the justification of his downfall, according to the Igbo World View. Achebe had mentioned in the "Preface" to the Second edition of this novel, his third, *The African Trilogy*, that it was the only one that he revised to restructure certain elements, mentioning his fascination with Ezeulu's destiny, the best of the land that became a victim in his community that subsequently rejected him, adding that it was the one he would always be caught rereading.

Whenever people have asked me which among my novels is my favorite, I have always evaded a direct answer, being strongly of the mind that in sheer invidiousness that question is fully comparable to asking a man to list his children in the order in which he loves them. A paterfamilias worth his salt will, if he must, speak about the peculiar attractiveness of each child.

For *Arrow of God*, that peculiar quality may lie in the fact that it is the novel which I am most likely to be caught sitting down to read again. On account of that, I have also become aware of certain structural weaknesses in it which I now take the opportunity of a new edition to improve. (*Arrow of God*, 165).

Furthermore, reacting to international criticisms of African literature, Achebe states in his essay, "Where Angels Fear to Tread": "no man can understand another whose language he does not speak (and 'language' here does not mean simply words, but a man's entire worldview.)<sup>3</sup> Then, Achebe distinguished between the entirely negative "hostile" critic, the entirely positive, "amazed" critic, and the "conscious critic," those who seek a balance. John Updike, an American writer, was surprised by Achebe's ending to his novel and stated that few Western writers would have contrived such a downfall of the hero. Achebe responded, reportedly, saying human subjects are also beholden to non-human forces in the unaverse, meaning that communalism was the bedrock of the Igbo political

system, and so it was an anomaly not often seen in African literature for the hero to be individualistic.<sup>4</sup>

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Speculative fiction as a supergenre, its history in literature, how it is viewed today, and its import in literary discourse for moving our world forward are all important subtopics to explore. Collins English dictionary describes speculative fiction simply as: “a broad literary genre encompassing any fiction with supernatural, fantastical, or futuristic elements.”<sup>5</sup> Cambridge Dictionary describes speculative fiction as “stories set in a world that is different from the one we live in, or that deals with magical or imagined future events.”<sup>6</sup>

Beyond these simple definitions, the term speculative fiction is a super-genre because it encompasses a large number of sub-genres of science fiction: Science fiction; Sci-fi fantasy fiction; Supernatural fiction; Space opera fiction; Urban fantasy fiction; Utopian fiction; Dystopian fiction; Apocalyptic fiction; Post-apocalyptic fiction; Alternate history fiction; and Superhero fiction.<sup>7</sup> The common denominator of this multiplicity of sub-genres is that they all have elements of the uncanny, mysterious, or supernatural, which turn reality on its head as the writer employs his or her imagination to bring up conjectures that totally reshape the outcome of events. It is common knowledge that although it had been in existence in literature writing for centuries. In the olden days, as Euripides attempted to present an alternative to the real truth, he explored how a Shaman woman resorted to infanticide and killed her own children in *Medea* rather than wait for the Corinthians to kill them. See *Beloved* by Toni Morrison, a similar story, in which out of love that passes human understanding, a slave woman killed her four children, to stop them being taken away from her into slavery, too, just like she was and suffered greatly. In William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, an AI summary puts it thus: "(...) is a comedy play written in about 1595 or 1596. Set in ancient Athens, the story weaves together multiple plots surrounding the wedding of Duke Theseus and Amazon Queen Hippolyta. Four young Athenian lovers become entangled in romantic confusion, while amateur actors rehearse a play for the wedding celebration. When both groups wander into an enchanted forest, mischievous fairies manipulate their affairs with magical potions, creating chaos under the moonlight as the fairy king and queen pursue their own domestic quarrel." Hence, in this classic Shakespearean play, characters move as they like in woodlands and fairyland

without hindrance from anything or anybody. In J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, the writer does not believe at all in the existence of other worldly beings in the world we know. In 1947, American multiple Science fiction writer, Robert Heinlein, differentiated between science fiction, in which he was immersed, from speculation fiction that had nothing to do with hard core science and its impact on societies of the world first.

Although speculative stories have been present since time immemorial, as mentioned above, the term speculative fiction was coined as a literary term by a science-fiction (Sci-Fi) author, Robert Heinlein, in 1947, and since then, speculative fiction has become more often termed "what if" books. Heinlein has been credited with many quotes arising from his numerous publications testifying to his speculative bent in Sc-fi: One, "I wasn't impressed. As it says in Bible, God fights on side of heaviest artillery" (*The Moon is a Harsh Mistress*); Two, "The noblest fate that a man can endure is to place his own mortal body between his loved home and the war's desolation" (*Starship Troopers*); Three, "Man is so built that he cannot imagine his own death. This leads to endless invention of religions." (*Stranger in a Strange Land*), and Four, "Never attempt to teach a pig to sing; it wastes your time and annoys the pig." (*Time enough for Love*). Some scholars and authors talk about so-called 'soft' and 'hard' speculative stories, stories of what could actually happen, without being teleported, while others are stories focusing on the impossible, as Margaret Atwood, for example, intimated in her 2011 work, *In Other Worlds: SF and the Human Imagination*. For Atwood, speculative fiction is realism: a story that "could happen but hasn't yet [happened]" (p. 7), meaning it can depict alternative futures. On the other hand, science fiction dwells on stories of romance or "fantasy [that] could not happen." Generally, Wikipedia terms speculative fiction a broad, "umbrella" term that explores imaginatively hypothetical and supernatural elements that tend to ask the question "what if" and to field alternatives to the commonly perceived reality. Such genres include alternative fantasy, history, science fiction, horror, superhero, or dystopian narratives focusing on the (im)possibilities of things or things that could happen but really have not happened. Therefore, the significance of speculative stories is that they make us speculate about life beyond the world we know as reality as we investigate society, the universe, and humanity.

However, since the twenty-first century, the genre of speculative fiction has expanded as newer fiction writers seek to explain what they do. Margaret Atwood, for example, largely seen as a feminist dystopian writer, speculated on a world in which women who refused to be mothers

and wives could be brought back home to marry and bear children. What would it take to make them return to tradition?" So, in the world of *The Handmaid's Tale* in Gilead, the feminist author speculated that they could be turned into reproductive slaves and allocated to upper-class families essentially to bear and rear children. Nnedi Okorafor, for her part, has even widened the genre with African input in her AfricanFuturism and AfricanJujuisim approaches in which complex, spirit, and spatial female beings fight western-type masculinist beings in search of a more equitable, fair, and just world. Nnedi Okorafor's contribution is a *Complete Binti Trilogy*: "a novella that explores themes of identity, culture, and xenophobia through the protagonist's journey. The story is set in a technologically advanced universe and explores the complexities of AfricanFuturism, integrating African cultural elements with futuristic narratives. Binti, a Himba woman (of indigenous Namibia), embarks on a transformative journey to Oomza University, an intergalactic institution, where she faces challenges related to her identity and the prejudices of different cultures. The novella is celebrated for its character-driven narrative and its exploration of post-colonialism and intersectionality, making it a significant work in the genre of speculative fiction" (see References).

Today, writers and authors tend to see speculative fiction as more fantasy than realism. Sebastien Doubinsky engages with the implications of speculative fiction in his writings on the genre, as well as on genre and gender in literature.<sup>8</sup> In Diana Wagonner's 1978 book, *The Hills of Faraway: A Guide to Fantasy*,<sup>9</sup> she describes "supernatural and/or nonexistent phenomena (such as the future) as a special class of objectively real things or events." (p. 9). Judith Josephine Grossman, with pen name Judith Merrill, editor, science fiction writer, short story writer and magazine editor, added a lot that promoted the speculative fiction genre, observing and stating that speculative fiction "makes use of fantastic and inventive elements to comment on, or speculate about society, humanity, life, the cosmos, reality [a]nd any other topics under the general heading of philosophy." (see "Introduction," "Shifting the Frame: Re-imagining Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* & *Arrow of God* as Speculative Narratives," Published online by Cambridge University Press: 07 October 2022: p. 3, In *Speculative Fiction and Science Fiction, African Literature Today*, # 39).

Hence, Achebe's *Arrow of God* and *Things Fall Apart* have been observed by some critics to include elements of the supernatural, the mystical, and the magical worlds found in speculative stories. Included in the speculations in the novel *Arrow of God* are broken societies, such as the six villages of Umuaro; the collapse of the community; the presence of

spirits and other supernatural elements; and initiation rites and rituals. The title of the novel, *Arrow of God*, symbolizes the chief protagonist, Ezeulu of Ulu kingdom (Ulu being an Igbo word for antidote). Ezeulu's hubris turned out to be his grab of power, when he was only the servant of the master, Ulu. As Achebe explained it in the novel, *Arrow of God*: "The man who carries a deity is not a king. He is there to perform his god's ritual and carry sacrifice to him." From that angle of vision, *Arrow of God* is a speculative fiction different and apart from regular, traditional reading of the work as colonial/postcolonial of tragic colonial power in Igboland literature gone awry. Its illustrious author changed the real history of *The History of Umuchu* into speculative fiction, and then measured the outcome of events thereafter. Immersed in the natural and supernatural worlds, *Arrow of God* after the debacle with the British colonizers and their exertion of power on the indigenous Chief priest of Ulu transforms into a power tussle between the powerful Chief Priest himself and his people who believe they are armed with the power of their god against the high priest when he chooses to abandon them, an abandonment that led to great famine in the land. Then, Obika, somewhat a clone of his father, dies mysteriously. What killed Obika? Was it the power of the spirits, their intervention in the human world, a sort of condemnation of the Chief Priest and his stance about the order of the world in their environment? Supernatural elements and intervention of unnatural elements in natural reality mirror the domain of speculative fiction in *Arrow of God*. Cogent questions that the author of *Arrow of God* asks in his novel are the following: What if the British had not come? What if Ezeulu of Ulu had not been in conflict with the British power and, simultaneously, with his rivals, the other indigenous chiefs of Umuro? What if Ezeulu (Chief Igwegbe, OmenụkọAkụ, of historical document) had not been appointed the paramount chief? What if Ezeulu went along with the British District Officer (D.O) and the British rules of mandate? The History of Ulu would have been different.

After a long delay of upwards of thirty years, finally, Chinua Achebe conceded that he borrowed from Umuchu oral history to write his novel, *Arrow of God*:

The only thing I want to say is that the reliance on oral history is something which we have to do. I believe that we have to rely a lot on oral history.... The whole thing is not a secret. I had already told people about this event which happened in this village. I had heard about it on radio and had given a fairly full account of this. There was a pro-

gramme which had been done by one of our best producers in those days called Chijioke Abagwe, in which someone was being interviewed who turned out to be Nnolim's uncle about his village and the story of this chief who was imprisoned by the D.O. came out in the interview. This was in the fifties. I was so fascinated by this story that I got Abagwe to locate this man again and again we went to his place and he told me a lot more about the incident. Not only that, we even went to his village in order to have a feel of this place. That's the indebtedness to Nnolim's uncle. I have used such things before, and I will use them again." (*Commonwealth*: 13.1, Autumn, 1990, 121-122).

Charles Nnolim, in his essay, "A Source for Arrow of God," published in *Research in African Literatures* (Volume 8, No. 1, Spring 1977),<sup>10</sup> accused Achebe of borrowing from him without acknowledgment of his source. Later, Ignatius Ajuru, in his article, "A Source for Arrow of God: Matters Arising, Charles Nnolim"<sup>11</sup>, analyzed the piece in-depth. One question Olatunbosun Taofeek had for Charles Nnolim after reading the accounts of the source of the novel was: "When does a pamphlet become a book?" And was the history of Umuchu only for the Nnolim's (sic)? Taofeek continues:

For the above questions, I might need to state that "literary ability is divorced from devotion to fact. Fact is the premise of history, while creative imagination is the premise of Literature." Furthermore, "literary imagination is an important key to the process by which the texts about reality are created, including the retrieval of past events since its creative play is mainly the source of our knowledge..." So, the retrieval of the history of Umuchu by Achebe may not be considered as stealing but creative representation. If this is stealing, then all writers are thieves because nobody owns the monopoly of a particular history or ideas in this world. For the idea on the mind of one person also rings in the thoughts of thousand persons. The treatment of the idea and how it is structured is what brings fresh and interesting interpretations to the old material."<sup>12</sup>

#### TRADITIONAL READING VS. SPECULATIVE READING OF ARROW OF GOD

*Arrow of God* as Igbo Traditional Fiction: This novel was mostly read as a sordid encounter between the colonizing imperial power and the Igbo kingdom that was irrevocably damaged by the vicissitudes of history,

never to return to its original self. We believe that a consistent reading of this novel as speculative fiction can lead to the recovery of the everlasting and eternal Igboland before the arrival of the British colonizing power. After that, we might be inclined to ask whether the effort is even worth it.

Published in 1964 as a historical novel of the Nigeria of the 1920s, the principal protagonist, Ezeulu, the Chief Priest of Ulu and the six villages of Umuaro struggles against the invading colonial British rule, amidst internal strife with his own community. Hence, the novel is at once a conflict between tradition and modernity, and also ego and power. The conflict is centered between Ezeulu's duty to obey tradition and the British alternative 'music' through the three arms of the executive administration. The British administrator wants to convert him to a Warrant Chief to serve their own ends. He refuses, and they imprison him. When he returns from prison, when the New Yam Festival could not begin until he sees the moon and declares the festival open. He refuses to carry out his duty that day, making the community starve due to famine. His arrogance isolates him from his people and the British administration, making him out as "something of a public enemy" (*Arrow of God* 393). All this just when he believed that he was the 'arrow of Ulu,' his god and that he was executing the will of Ulu and therefore of his community and people. Ezeulu fails and loses his mind in the ensuing confusion; he was neither with the British nor, worse, with his own people. As an Igbo proverb puts it, you can never be bigger than your community, no matter how big you become. It is a tragic end and a complex situation that goes beyond the mere post-colonial interpretation of the themes of the impact of Christianity in the African rural environment, the nuances of power, cultural transition, and the danger of personal pride, leading to the destruction of one Igbo community through internal division. Achebe recreates the tragedy of a most just man becoming inadvertently a victim in a tirade of wise sayings: "It seemed so much easier to deal with an old quarrel than a new, unprecedented incident."

His (Ezeulu of Ulu's) quarrel with the white man was insignificant beside the matter he must settle with his own people. [...] no one came near enough to him to see his anguish, and if they had seen it, they would not have understood.

*Arrow of God* as Igbo Speculative Fiction: Observe that the flouncy title of the novel is nothing more than a symbolic description of the principal protagonist, Ezeulu, as the "arrow" of the god he serves, the deity Ulu.

Ezeulu thereafter sees himself as half man and half spirit. Ezeulu conveys his pride and obstinacy through an interpreter to Mr. Clarke: "Tell the white man that Ezeulu will not be anybody's chief, except Ulu" (*Arrow of God*, 352). According to an Igbo proverb, a person or an event represents the will of God. So, Captain Winterbottom throws Ezeulu into prison for thirty-two days, that was eight eke weeks total, for refusing to condone British indirect rule system of administration that wanted to make him a warrant, paramount chief beholden to the foreign power on his soil, thereby setting off a chain of events that resulted into the vicissitudes of history that culminated into the fictional representation we now know as the novel *Arrow of God*. The headstrong Chief Ezeulu, rather than feel relief at his regained freedom, turns into a 'mockingbird' of the British colonial presence, saying: "I prefer to deal with a man who throws up a stone and puts his head to receive it, not one who shouts for a fight but when it comes he trembles and passes premature shit" (*Arrow of God*, 358).

Furthermore, Ezeulu realizes that his more formidable enemies are really the factious elders of the six-nation Umuaro, which they all belong to, led by his archrival and enemy, Nwaka. And Ezeulu made up his mind to fight them. He had had a vision of these elders in the presence of his own grandfather merged into himself was shouted down and spat upon by the irritated elders because he had not called the festival after observing the moon (*Arrow of God*, 337). Ezeulu then stated: "Let the white man detain him not for one day but one year so that his deity, not seeing him in his place, would ask Umuaro questions." Mr. John Jaja Goodcountry profits from the internal strife between Ezeulu and the other chiefs in his six-village Umuaro to proselytize and draw adherents to his church. In order to arrest the famine that had gripped the land, he moved to salvage the unharvested yams rotting away in the soil. Furthermore, Obika, Ezeulu's first son, dies mysteriously during an innocuous traditional ceremony of Ogbazuluobodo when the ayaka masquerade runs the length and breadth of the village, liberally with the speed of lightning, if he is indeed good at the art of it (*Arrow of God*, 410). Was that a sign that the god Ulu was angry as well with the Chief Priest, as the community thought? Obika had departed as a mighty warrior, despite running a fever, sure of his mettle and "leaving potent words (of valor) in the air behind:

*The fly that struts around a mound of excrement wastes his time; the mound will always be greater than the fly. The thing that beats the drum of ngwesi is inside the ground. Darkness is so great it gives horns to a dog. He who builds a homestead before another can boast more broken pots. It is ofo that*

*gives rain-water power to cut dry earth. The man who walks ahead of his fellows spots spirits on the way. Bat said he knew his ugliness and chose to fly by night. When the air is fouled by a man on top of a palm tree the fly is confused. An ill-fated man drinks water and it catches in his teeth. .... Even while the people are still talking about the man Rat bit to death Lizard takes money to have his teeth filed. He who sees an old hag squatting should leave her alone; who knows how she breathes? White ant chews igbegulu because it is lying on the ground; let him climb the palm tree and chew. He who will swallow udala seeds must consider the size of his anus. The fly that has no one to advise him follows the coffin into the ground. .... When a handshake passes the elbow it becomes another thing. The sleep that lasts from one market day to another has become death. The man who likes the meat of the funeral ram, why does he recover when sickness visits him? The mighty tree falls and the little birds scatter in the bush. .... The bird which hops off the ground and lands on an anthill may not know it, but is still on the ground. .... A common snake which a man sees all lone may become a python in his eyes. The very Thing which kills Mother Rat is always there to make sure that its young ones never open their eyes. .... The boy who persists in asking what happened to father before he has enough strength to avenge him is asking for his father's fate. .... The man who belittles the sickness which Monkey has suffered should ask to see the eyes which his nurse got from blowing the sick fire. .... When death wants to take a little dog it prevents it from smelling even excrement. .... (Arrow of God, 408-409).*

Even the Christian Bible, which author Chinua Achebe was also as very conversant with as he was with Igbo folklore and traditions, given his background as the son of a convert and evangelist under colonial rule, tells us in Exodus 33: 20 that God has mysterious ways of appearing to humans to flaunt and demonstrate His power: "You cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live." In another instance in the Bible, Hebrews 1:1, God's presence was mediated, for he spoke to humans through the prophets. In Igbo theophany, Chukwu or Chineke has never been visible to humans either. But his presence is acknowledged through signs in nature: wind, water, and fire. He does not act but through lesser gods represented in various symbolic ways, such as stone, wood, and more. These gods themselves in the Igbo pantheon are visible through the priests and priestesses who carry out their wishes.

The big question, then, is how one must interpret the relevance of Ezeulu from the perspective of Igbo speculative fiction. It is noteworthy that he describes himself, an 'Arrow' in the Bow 'of' his 'God,' Ulu. And he was unflinching about refusal to bow to any other god, least of all a

foreign god. Is he a divine will designed to hit a particular target, the British colonial presence in his time, or perhaps the cynical people of his community of Umuaro, who once accepted him as Chief Priest of Ulu but have now abandoned him? Second, is he meant to be divine noble warrior to hit and scatter the enemies of the Igbo nation and save it from the evil machinations of a conquering foreign presence? After all, he was bewildered and, in spite of himself, sent his son, Oduche, to learn the ways of those people. In time, it would be clear whether they were bad or good ways. He was almost sure that survival in the future, going forward after the encounter, would require knowledge of the foreign culture that wins a war without being right. His Igbo people would not fight an unjust war, a battle for which they would be faulted. Third, was he divine retribution, and the manifest 'arrow of famine' against the complicit and cynical Mbanovillagers in the decimation of their own people? These are various ways to see Ezeulu as the 'arrow of God' of the novel's title: as wrath or divine judgment; as deliverance or protection, as divine purpose or guidance, as metaphysical or prophetic, and more. Why does 'speculation fiction' in African literature matter today? Why must we reread Igbo literature as speculation stories? What do these pieces of literature matter in the world-building of today? Reading Igbo literature as speculation fiction, in this case *Arrow of God*, matters and can lead to a more desirable future for African literature and the African worlds.

## CONCLUSION

This essay has attempted to demonstrate that *Arrow of God* is a specimen of Igbo speculative fiction because of certain thematic and structural pillars inherent in the novel. Achebe himself attested that it was his only published work that he restructured after publication because the structure of the novel was that important to him. Some of these elements include 'the novum,' meaning the new thing (literary critic, Darko Sulvin), whether it is in science fiction, or in a work as *Arrow of God*, the magical, mythical, or mysterious divergences from known concrete reality. Then again, *Arrow of God* maintains internal consistency and world-building, for in spite of these intrusions of the supernatural into the novel, they are not aspects of nature that are unknown to the Igbo world. The Igbo cultural worldview holds that there are parallel universes and that beings from these universes constantly intersect and communicate. This strategy, sometimes termed cognitive estrangement, allows the reader to step back and (re)consider his or her society from a distance, to gain a better under-

standing of its reality and to work towards an alternative, thanks to new conjured settings that mix emotions and social conflicts. Indeed, in *Arrow of God* Achebe took the negative impacts of colonialism, and by extension globalization, on Igbo culture and extrapolated it beyond its logical end, at once as a warning and a philosophical exploration of things that can happen to the Igbo world, and by extension the African world, if they fail to heed the lessons of past history, refuse to negotiate wisely in the new world-building carrying their goatskin bag straight, not slanting, askew, or bent.

## NOTES

1. (Filosofia *Theoretica: Journal of African Philosophy, Culture and Religion*. Vol. 2 No. 2, July - December 2013, p. 533; <https://www.ikechukwuanthonykanu.com/repo/AFRICAN%20COSMOLOGY.pdf> ).

2. (<https://www.bing.com/search?q=igbo+cosmology&q=MT&rpq=igbo+cosmology&sc=8-14&cvid=546F21963D8E4BA1834BA051446A4697&FORM=QBRE&sp=1&clq=0> ).

3. December 1962 issue of Nigeria Magazine.

4. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinua\\_Achebe](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinua_Achebe)

5. (Collins English Dictionary – Complete & Unabridged" 2012 Digital Edition © William Collins Sons & Co. Ltd. 1979, 1986 © HarperCollins Publishers 1998, 2000, 2003, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2009, 2012 <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/speculative-fiction> )

6. (<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/speculative-fiction> ).

7. Subgenres of speculative fiction Super genres include:

Sub-genres of Speculative Fiction

Most speculative fiction novels fall under at least one of the following genres. Some may fall into multiple genres depending on the story structure:

- Science fiction: stories with imagined technologies that don't exist in the real world, like time travel, aliens, and robots.

- Sci-fi fantasy fiction: sci-fi stories inspired by mythology, folklore, and fairy tales that combine imagined technologies with elements of magical realism.

- Supernatural fiction: sci-fi stories about secret knowledge or hidden abilities, including witchcraft, spiritualism, and psychic abilities.

- Space opera fiction: a play on the term "soap opera," sci-fi stories that take place in outer space and center around conflict, romance, and adventure.

- Urban fantasy fiction: fantasy stories that take place in an urban setting in the real world but operate under magical rules.

- Utopian fiction: stories about civilizations the authors deem to be perfect, ideal societies.

- Dystopian fiction: stories about societies deemed problematic within the world of the novel, often satirizing government rules, poverty, and oppression.

- Apocalyptic fiction: stories that take place before and during a huge disaster that wipes out a significant portion of the world's population. The stories center around characters doing everything they can to stay alive—for example, running from zombies or trying to avoid a deadly plague.

- Post-apocalyptic fiction: stories that take place after an apocalyptic event and focus on the survivors figuring out how to navigate their new circumstances—for example, emerging after a global nuclear holocaust or surviving a total breakdown of society.

- Alternate history fiction: stories that focus on true historical events but are written as if they are unfolded with different outcomes.

- Superhero fiction: stories about superheroes and how they use their abilities to fight supervillains.

<https://www.masterclass.com/articles/what-is-speculative-fiction-defining-and-understanding-the-different-genres-of-speculative-fiction> Accessed 05/03/2026.

8. "Women of Horror and Speculative Fiction in Their Own Words: Conversations with Authors and Editors." Sébastien Doubinsky (Anthology Editor), Christina Kkona (Anthology Editor). Bloomsbury Publishing, 2024. <https://www.bloomsbury.com/in/women-of-horror-and-speculative-fiction-in-their-own-words-9781501384479/> Accessed 04/30/2026).

9. (New York: Atheneum Publishers, 1978).

10. An account of *Arrow of God* as speculative history states that Simon A. Nnolim in pamphlet, *The History of Umuchu*, states that Mr. J.G. Lawton (misspelled as Lotain by S.A. Nnolim), Acting D. O. in charge of Awka District, replaced J.B. Gardiner, who in 1913 imprisoned Mr. Ezeagu Uchu. In "Chief Igwegbe Odum: The Omenụkọ of History" (Nigeria Magazine, No. 90, 1966, pp. 222-223), A.E. Afigbo states that after the release of Ezeagu Uchu from prison, Omenụkọ was appointed to the paramount chieftaincy of Ajalli-Umuchu and Arondizuogu, where Chief Igwegbe Odum hailed and was (Ajalli-Umuchu) administered as a unit. Mr. Lawton wrote to Mr. Roberts, the resident officer at Onitsha, a letter of complaint that the paramount chieftaincy was not working well with Chief Igwegbe, where chief Ezeagu Uchu was Chief Priest in Ajalli. Division, from 1914 to 1918. Factioneers added salt to injury by accusing Ezeagu Uchu of leading them when he was not suitable to do so. Roberts terminated Igwegbe's appointment in 1917. In 1918, coincidentally the year of German measles, Lawton was succeeded by District Officer W.H. Lloyd. Igwegbe contested his removal, accusing the court clerk, Mr. Kerri, of bribing him with 100 pounds to help placate the rebellious chiefs, who had opposed his appointment. Mr. Kerri successfully denied Chief Igwegbe (Omenụkọ)'s charge. The Inspector of Police (IP), Mr. Dodson, wrote an unfavorable report about Igwegbe Odu, alias OmenụkọAkụ (He who displays largesse in times of great scarcity). Mr. Lawton then terminated Igwegbe's warranty as the local Chief of Oneh before handing over to Floyd. In 1918, Chief Igwegbe was publicly reprimanded in front of other chiefs, and he retired discredited. He was imprisoned in Awka. Simon A. Nnolim had told this story in the 1950s to a radio announcer at Radio Ajalli, Mr. Chijoke Abagwe (Commonwealth 13.1. Autumn 1940, 121-122).

Literary critic Olatunbosun Taofeek challenged Charles Nnolim's version of the story on the origins of *Arrow of God* and *Things Fall Apart* in 2022, while conceding some limitations to Achebe's silence on how he stumbled on the original history story

from which he constructed his novel, stating: "It is surely more than coincidence that Achebe's Umuaro is Nnolim's Umuchu; that Achebe's Ezeulu is Nnolim's Ezeagu; that Achebe's god, Ulu, is Nnolim's Uchu; that Achebe's six villages which sought amalgamation are Nnolim's Seed Yam Festival; that Achebe's missionary, "Hargreaves," is no more than Nnolim's anthropologist, "Hargreaves"; that Achebe's story of Umuama and the sacred python is Nnolim's Umunama and the sacred short snake; that Nnolim's Gun Breaker, J.G. Lotain (Lowton), is Achebe's Gun Breaker, Winterbottom; that Achebe's "The Festival of Pumpkin Leaves" is Nnolim's "The Feast of Throwing First Tender Pumpkin Leaves"; that Achebe's ceremony of Coverture is Nnolim's ceremony of Nkpu; that the main market in Achebe's Umuaro and Nnolim's Umuchu is Nkwọ, where the Ikolo and amalgamation fetish in both sources are located." ("*Arrow of God* and *Things Fall Apart: Origin of The Manuscripts*" written by February 6, 2022, *Arrow of God and Things Fall Apart: Origin of The Manuscripts* | Independent Newspaper, Nigeria). Taofeek asks Charles Nnolim some cogent questions and goes on to answer his own questions, stressing that it is the writer's prerogative to take a historical factual matter and turn it into literature by his power of imagination.

<sup>11</sup> Charles E. Nnolim (*OKIKE, an AFRICAN JOURNAL OF NEW WRITING*, NUMBER 52,

01 NOVEMBER 2014 ISSN 0331-0566, Achebe reportedly borrowed extensively from colonial history in Igboland.

<sup>12</sup> ("*Arrow of God* and *Things Fall Apart: Origin of the Manuscripts*" written by Olatunbosun Taofeek. February 6, 2022, "*Arrow of God* and *Things Fall Apart: Origin of The Manuscripts*" | *Independent Newspaper*, Nigeria).

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