

Tribalism as Thematic Concern in Chukwuemeka Ike's *Toads for Supper*

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Abstract

Tribalism and the personal response to it are issues of concern in the Nigerian society across various spheres of life. Creative narratives abound on this disturbing issue and one of such is Chukwuemeka Ike's novel, *Toads for Supper (TFS)*. Ike in this novel creates awareness about the phenomenon of tribalism in Nigeria and its various consequences. Using deconstruction theory, this paper deconstructs how the style of a writer can help expose social ills in the society such as tribalism and the response of an individual to such a tendency. The paper examines how Ike uses selected episodes to lampoon tribalism, a major concern in Nigeria. This paper further examines how the writer uses such episodes to portray the negative consequences of tribalism in the day-to-day dealings of individuals. The creative craft of Ike further demonstrates that literature is a veritable means of chronicling and critiquing societal vices.

Keywords: Behaviour, social identity theory, themes, tribalism

Introduction

Tribalism affects people's relationship in any human society. Undoubtedly, it breeds sectionalism and disunity among people within the same country. It retards development, because people cannot see each other and one another as one, as they cannot cross fertilize ideas that can bring meaningful development to their country. Tribalism affects individuals negatively from different angles, just like it affects a nation negatively.

Tribalism, which is loyalty to one's ethnic group above national interests, has historically hindered Nigeria's unity and development (Ayo, 2004). In different walks of life in Nigeria, tribalistic individuals abound and they always display tribalistic postures towards others which often put people at a disadvantage. Those who are tribalistic always see those who are not from tribes as people they should not associate with and by doing this subject them to untold hardship. Individuals who are tribal always

make people feel unwanted when they display tribalistic attitude towards them.

Tribalism remains a pervasive issue in the Nigerian society, affecting various aspects of life, including politics, education, and social relationships. This phenomenon is reflected in literary works, such as Chukwuemeka Ike's *Toads for Supper (TFS)*, which explores the complexities of tribalism and personal attitude in post-colonial Nigeria. A reading of this novel can provide valuable insights into how Ike uses language to convey the tensions and conflicts arising from tribal affiliations.

Literature provides a powerful platform for exploring and critiquing societal issues such as tribalism. Ike's *TFS* is a notable example of a novel that tackles the complexities of tribalism in Nigeria. Through its characters and narrative, the novel sheds lights on ways in which tribal affiliations can shape individual

experiences and relationships. By examining the novel's literary features, one can gain a deeper understanding of how tribalism is represented and critiqued in the text.

Personal attitude plays a crucial role in shaping individual experiences and relationships in *TFS*. The novel highlights how characters' attitude towards tribalism and identity influence their interactions and decisions. By exploring the relationship between tribalism and personal attitude, researchers can gain insight into the ways in which individuals navigate complex social contact (Achebe, 1975; Okpewho, 1992). This is particularly relevant in the Nigerian context, where tribalism continues to be a significant factor in shaping social relationships and opportunities.

Despite being written several decades ago, *Toads for Supper* remains a relevant and thought-provoking work in contemporary Nigeria. The novel's exploration of tribalism and personal attitude continues to resonate with readers, particularly in the context of ongoing debates about identity, diversity and national unity. By examining the novel's thematic concern of tribalism, one gains deeper understanding of the complexities of Nigerian society and the ways in which literature reflects and shapes social attitudes (Okiri, 1991). This study therefore aims to provide a nuanced analysis of tribalism and personal attitude in *TFS*, given the growing and disturbing phenomena of tribalism manifested in ethnic bigotry, violence, and nepotism in Nigeria.

Synopsis of *Toads for Supper*

Chukwuemeka Ike's *Toads for Supper* is set in the imaginary University of Southern Nigeria and revolves around the lives of its key characters, Amadi, Aduke, Chima, Sweetie and Nwakaego. Amadi

Chukwuka, a freshman History student from a rural community in Eastern Nigeria, navigates university life with exuberance, seeking to balance social and academic pursuit. Amadi's primary objective is to win the favour of Aduke, a fellow undergraduate, despite prevailing tribal prejudices on campus. As Amadi pursues Aduke, he faces challenges and complications, including his existing betrothal to Nwakaego as a mere formality and to focus on causal relationships with other women. However, Amadi's involvement with Sweetie, a Lagos-based woman, leads to accusations of impregnating her, resulting in severe consequences, including rustication from the university and strained relationships with his family and Aduke. Despite these setbacks, Amadi continues to pursue Aduke, and they eventually become engaged.

The novel's climax is marked by Amadi's trip to Ilesha to negotiate his proposed marriage to Aduke with her relatives. However, upon his return, he is summoned home, where he learns that his father is dying and that Nwakaego is still waiting for him. This revelation throws Amadi into confusion, particularly given his engagement to Aduke. The novel concludes with Aduke's mental breakdown and Amadi's realisation of the complexities and consequences of his actions.

Theoretical Framework

This paper employs the Social Identity Theory (SIT) theory in the analysis of the text. Social Identity Theory (SIT), a core concept in social psychology, explores how individuals develop a sense of self based on their group memberships. It suggests that people's identities are shaped not only by their personal traits but also by the groups they belong to, like ethnicity, nationality, or profession. This theory

highlights how individuals categorize themselves and others into groups, compare their group's status to others, and strive for a positive social identity.

The theory originated in studies using the “minimal group paradigm” in the early 1970s (Tajfel et al, 1971). These studies demonstrated people’s apparently inherent desire to distinguish themselves from others based on group memberships, and their willingness to sacrifice absolute levels of rewards to maintain relative superiority over members of other groups. For example, research participants would accept lower cash payments for their ingroup, so long as an outgroup’s payments were even lower. From these studies, Tajfel and Turner (1979) developed SIT, a sophisticated model of how individual identity-related motivations predict individual tendencies to discriminate between groups. The model also describes how those individual identity processes predict both individual and collective responses to societal-level group status (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

According to SIT, categorization of the social world is a natural and inevitable human instinct, serving to simplify one’s environment. As we categorize people into groups, we also categorize ourselves into some of those same groups—social identification. Once we “belong” to a group (our “ingroup”), we seek ways to gain positive feelings from that group membership. Viewing the ingroup more positively than other groups (“outgroups”) is one way to achieve those positive feelings. Seeking positive distinctiveness for one’s ingroup hence becomes an explanation for holding negative beliefs and attitudes about outgroups in one’s environment, and hence for prejudice and ultimately discrimination. The motivational basis of social identity theory in a desire for positive self-concept (Abrams & Hogg, 1988) has been supplemented in recent years by additional

explanations—for example that (self-) categorization and intergroup differentiation is a way to reduce uncertainty (Hogg, 2000). Empirical examinations of social identity theory have shown that ingroup favouritism is not isomorphic with outgroup derogation (Mummendey & Otten, 1998).

Social identity theory originated from the conviction that group membership can help people to instil meaning in social situations. Group membership helps people to define who they are and to determine how they relate to others. Social identity theory was developed as an integrative theory, as it aimed to connect cognitive processes and behavioural motivation. Initially, its main focus was on intergroup conflict and intergroup relations more broadly. For that reason, the theory was originally referred to as the social identity theory of intergroup relations. Social identity theory provides a powerful framework for understating the complexities of tribalism and personal attitude in *TFS*. By applying this theory to the novel, one understands how characters’ social identities shape their attitudes and behaviours towards tribalism.

Chukwuemeka Ike is a prolific Nigerian writer. He has published 17 books in total which includes 11fiction and 6 non-fiction books. Despite his wonderful publications, he has rarely been discussed in the literature. Thus, there is very limited literature available on his works, except some book reviews, explanatory essays and some academic research done by students mostly from Nigeria, his country of birth. A stylistic analysis by Mohammad, Muazzam Sharif1 et al. (2021) reveal the artistic effect created by the language showing that the author used simple clear language to highlight some of the most important and prominent culture and traditions of Nigerian society.

Thus, the language used revealed how the Nigerian youth think about certain things. The Nigerian words and phrases in the text show the nativity and nationalism of these young university students in Nigeria. The diction used in the novel also exposes the uneducated and/or less educated class of the Nigerian society. Going by the diction, *Toads for Supper* is rendered in the typical linguistic habit of undergraduates of Nigerian universities – the tendency to start a conversation in Standard English, and transit to using slangs in English, Igbo words and expressions as well as frequently code-switching into the native language of the environment. The present study is more of thematic treatment not stylistic.

Charles Alex Patrick (2024) examines the craft deployed by Ike in naming his comic characters and the impact that the names have on their behaviours and roles by analysing four of his novels namely, *The Naked Gods*, *The Potter Wheel*, *The Bottled Leopard* and *Toads for Supper*. He revealed that in these selected novels there is always a harmonious interplay between the names and the roles played by the characters. Ike's naming convention manifests sterling ingenuity and illuminating logic evident in how his characters' antics and semantics reinforce the names they bear. It is obvious that for Ike, the art of naming goes beyond merely identifying or differentiating characters; it performs additional functions of enhancing characterisation, developing meaning and censoring awry behaviour. The author is an unapologetic satirist, characters bear names that accentuate their behaviour, attitudes and attributes through which he makes moral statements. Therefore, the synergy between the roles and names of characters in his works reveals Ike to be a writer who is under the constant influence of imaginative brainwaves and clairvoyant perceptiveness.

Again, Charles Alex Patrick (2022) examined the language, style and other narrative devices in Ike's novels. The diagnostic objective of the paper is based on the interpretative analysis of Ike's linguistic medium to determine how they aid in giving expressions to his vision as a writer. It reveals that colloquial and evocative language layered with oral resources provides the fertile medium through which Ike portrays the absurdities and decadence inherent in his society. His craftsmanship and talent glistens from effective and efficient deployment of literary style like the third person narrative point of view, dream motif, flashback, songs, metaphor, proverbs, adjectival density in which Ike piles up superlative and superficial adjectives while describing his characters which often make his language genial and turgid.

Isidore Chukwuma Nnadi (2010) explores the linguistic devices of diction, tones and stylistically significant phrasal and clausal typology, sentence structures and punctuation patterns have combined to produce the aesthetics of Ike's novels. Isidore reveals that Ike's lexical selection delivers the message of the novels in spite of the presence of native words, some idiosyncratic coinages and his flair for neologistic style. His clausal nesting, even when it appears heavy, does not blur comprehension; it is woven to match the prevailing situations in the stories. Truncated sentence patterns signal fast movement of scenes. Nonetheless, the present analysis focuses on the theme of tribalism which previous works on *TFS* have not really given attention.

Themes of Tribalism in *Toads for Supper*

This section of the paper provides an analysis of some core episodes Chukwuemeka Ike raised in *TFS* to portray tribalism and its consequences. These are

highlighted below according to some thematic selection.

Rejection of Inter-Tribal Relationship

In Chukwuemeka Ike's *TFS*, the theme of rejection of inter-tribal relationships is a pervasive and complex issue that permeates the lives of the main characters, particularly in the context of romantic relationships and marriage. Set against the backdrop of a Nigerian university in the post-colonial era, the novel highlights the tensions and conflicts that arise when individuals from different tribal backgrounds attempt to form relationships with one another. The rejection of inter-tribal relationships is deeply ingrained in the societal norms and expectations of the characters, with many viewing such relationships as taboo or unworkable. Through the experiences of Amadi and Aduke, two young lovers from different tribal backgrounds, Ike explores the challenges and consequences of defying these societal norms, shedding light on the intricacies of tribal identity, cultural heritage, and the complexities of modern relationships in a rapidly changing society. By examining the rejection of inter-tribal relationships in *TFS*, Ike offers a nuanced and thought-provoking exploration of identity, culture and relationships in post-colonial Nigeria. The excerpt below introduces us to this theme in the novel:

Miss Solanke don tell us say any time Obi come ask for am,

Make we tell am say she no dey for Hall. Make you no tell am na me tell you O! Na only because me I no like de way you dey waste your time come here every day das why I tell you de troot (3)

From the episode above, it is clear that Miss Solanke is being tribalistic. She does not want to associate with Obi simply because she is a Yoruba and Obi is an Igbo by tribe. The writer of this novel, Chukwuemeka Ike, did not just showcase the episode above, just for writing's sake, he has brought the episode to the fore simply because he knows how traumatizing it is to avoid dealing with people simply because of where they come from. After all, no human being chooses the tribe he or she wishes to be when coming to this world. Every human person merely finds himself or herself in a country and in a tribe chosen for him or her by God Almighty. From the above episode, tribalism dampens the moral of those whom one expresses tribalistic tendencies towards. Tribalism does not in any way make people happy when they are being neglected or denied whatever opportunity. Obi in the episode above cannot be happy because Miss Solanke avoids associating with him only as a result of him being an Igbo. Also from the above episode, it is evident that tribalistic individuals treat people outside their own tribe shabbily just like Miss Solanke treats Obi shabbily in the above episode, making him to merely waste his time coming to look for her, when indeed she knows in her mind that she does not want to marry him or be in any relationship with him. This epitomizes how tribalistic individuals behave when they don't want to have anything to do with someone outside their tribal background, they avoid the person like a plague.

Tribal/Political Sentiment

In another episode highlighted in the novel, the election of the students' union which is a straight fight between Ezenagu, an Igbo, and Obafemi, a Yoruba

brings to the fore tribal tussle on the campus of the world of the novel. The Episode below typifies hatred arising from tribal sentiment. Much as Ezenagu mounted the podium to address his fellow students to canvass for votes in the students' Union election, a student quickly tongue lashed him, saying:

What service have you rendered the Union you braggart?

You think you can come here to show us you are

Studying French revolution which we all mastered in the

Primary school, you cook Robin!
(20)

The above episode exemplifies hatred arising from tribal sentiment, while operating in a political setting. The speaker in the episode simply does not like Ezenagu, because he is from a different tribe, which in deed does not augur well with him. From an ideal stand point what should have been of concern is the service which an individual can render while upholding a political office, not his or her place of birth or tribe as the case may be. From the above episode, tribalism will always blind an individual's eyes from looking at things from a realistic dimension, rather it will always make one shallow minded. Based on these prevalent and complex issues portrays by Ike, therefore, the reader is able to become aware of the way tribal individuals operate and how they often affect the lives of others devastatingly. The writer stylistically tries to bring the episode above to the fore for the reader to know more about tribalism and its effect, since literature is a veritable means of achieving a social goal.

Nom-achievement of Goals by Individuals

As a way to condemn tribalism even further, Ike reinforces his hatred for tribalism in the episode below. Tribalism prevents individuals from achieving whatever their aims or goals are whether politically, socially or otherwise.

The morning before Election Day three candidates notified the

Electoral officer that they no longer wished to contest the

election. No reasons were given in their letters. At first, many

took it that the three candidates had decided to step down for

fear of losing their deposits. Then a handwritten article

appeared on all student notice boards entitled:

DOWN TO

TRIBALISM. The writer observed that all three of the

candidates who were standing down came from the same

tribe (101)

From the above episode, it is evident that those candidates contesting in the SUG election, withdrew on the basis that they tend to be afraid of losing in the election as they foresee that they will lose much as those from the other tribe will have upper hand in the election in question. The inscription "**DOWN WITH TRIBALISM**" as stated in the episode is a way to show the writer's hatred for all tribalistic tendencies. Stylistically the writer uses one of the students to express his own position on tribalistic display when it comes to issue of importance. From Ike's point of view therefore, tribalism will always prevent things from going in the right direction, as there will always

be an injection of sentiment when people operate based on tribal lines in their day-to-day activities.

Tribalism Kills Love

There is no gainsaying the fact that tribalism destroys the love between two individuals who are in love when one of them or even the duo act based on tribal sentiment. In the episode below, Amadi condemns Aduke, saying that whenever he talks about inter-tribal marriages, much as both are of different ethnic backgrounds, Aduke always toe tribal lines, raising ideas, capable of truncating their relationship. This makes Amadi flare up saying:

... Each time I spoke of inter-tribal marriages you ran through a long list of the problems which would make such marriages unsuccessful- language difficulties, the long distance between your home and mine, cultural differences, political problems, and so on. D'you remember once telling me that your grandmother threatened to die if you married a kobokobo (172)

The above episode shows Amadi's position as far as his relationship with Aduke is concerned.

The annoyance of Amadi is the indirect reaction of Chukwuemeka Ike regarding negative attitude towards inter-tribal marriages. To Ike much as we all are Nigerians, somebody can marry anybody since all Nigerians are first, of all human beings, before knowing oneself as Hausa, Ibo, or Yoruba as the case may be. Ike believes that tribal sentiment should be jettisoned, so that we begin to see ourselves as children of the same father and mother, that is children of Adam and Eve. Ike believes tribalism

divides Nigerians, and so, we must join hands together to ward off this social evil.

Avoidance as Escape

In the Nigerian context, people conventionally avoid those in other tribes, as they tend not to believe in them or perhaps that they fear that they might in one way or the other harm them. The writer uses the episode below to showcase how some Nigerians often avoid inter personal relationship with other Nigerians who are not from the tribe with them. The episode below exemplifies this.

Amadi was an Igbo, and there was no question of their ever getting married. No Yoruba of her acquaintance had done anything as crazy as marrying a 'kobokobo' the derogatory name for the Igbo, perhaps because the Igbos called the penny a kobo. If she had not brushed him aside completely, it was because she knew they could get nowhere. (118)

In the above episode, it is crystal clear that the Yoruba people for long have been avoiding marrying the Igbo people, more like a convention that it is forbidden for a Yoruba person to marry an Igbo person. This is to show the destructive effect of tribalism. Tribalism does not allow relationship to thrive in Nigeria. It is a killer of people's relationship. Undoubtedly, tribalism kills love. From the episode above, it is clear that Yoruba people and Igbo people in the world of this novel don't come close, when it comes to marriage and this is what Chukwuemeka Ike, as a writer considers a misnomer, as people are merely set apart on the basis of tribal sentiment. To Chukwuemeka Ike tribalism does not bring about the growth of the entire country as people don't see themselves as one.

Tribalism breeds disunity among Nigeria and this is what Chukwuemeka Ike considers antithetical, as Nigerians are supposed to see themselves as one.

Conclusion

In this paper, the analysis has shown that Ike has accomplished a nuanced exploration of the complexities of tribalism and its impact on personal relationships and individual goals. Through close reading of the novel, the author sheds light on the themes of rejection of inter-tribal relationships, tribal/political sentiment, and the ways in which tribalism can prevent individuals from achieving their goals. The analysis reveals that Ike's novel is not just a romantic tale, but a scathing critique of the societal norms that prioritise tribal affiliations over personal relationships and individual aspirations. The paper demonstrates that Ike's portrayal of tribalism versus love affairs highlights the tension between traditional expectations and modern desires. The characters' struggles to navigate these complexities serve as a commentary on the societal pressures that shape individual attitudes and behaviours. Furthermore, the analysis of avoidance as an escape mechanism underscores the ways in which characters attempt to sidestep the consequences of their actions, often with disastrous results. By examining these themes, the author provides a rich understanding of the ways in which tribalism permeates every aspect of life in post-colonial Nigeria.

Ultimately, this paper shows ways in which literature reflects and critiques societal norms. Through the deconstruction of *Toads for Supper*, readers can gain a deeper understanding of the complexities of tribalism and its impact on individual relationships and goals. The study highlights the importance of considering the social and cultural contexts in which

literature is written and received, and demonstrates the value of literary analysis in uncovering the nuances of human experience. By examining the theme of tribalism and its manifestations in *Toads for Supper*, readers can learn about the ways in which societal norms shape individual attitudes and behaviours and the importance of challenging these norms in pursuit of personal freedom and fulfilment.

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