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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3126/ps.v23i1.77523>Available: <https://www.nepjol.info/index.php/ps>**Pandemic Responses in Chinua Achebe's Short Story "The Sacrificial Egg"**

¹Uday Chandra Chapai
Lecturer, Department of English
Dhawalagiri Multiple Campus, TU
Email: udayachandra72@gmail.com

²Prakash Sharma
Lecturer, Department of English
Dhawalagiri Multiple Campus, TU
Email: sharmaprakash166@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper examines and analyzes the causes of the Smallpox pandemic and people's responses toward it in Chinua Achebe's short story "The Sacrificial Egg". The smallpox pandemic has damaged various dimensions of Umuru, including its place and people. The busy port bears its degradation and contamination along with Western encroachment. Umuru people follow the Churches and their education after their colonization. The new generation disobeys their elders and disrespects their traditional deities. As revenge, the evil deity Kitikpa incarnates in the form of smallpox. As a result of the pandemic, the sprawling, busy, and crowded Nkwo market turns into silence under the ruling strength of flies. Smallpox as a colonial gift breaks and stops usual activities. Everything turns into a vast emptiness. Consequently, it claims that a catastrophic smallpox pandemic affects human activities and people respond variously to it. It aims to discuss issues like flight and flee, violence and rituals, piety and cults, and social distancing and lockdown as responses to the pandemic. In this context, following qualitative research design, this paper employs critical, interpretative, and analytical methods to attain the claim. Picking up lines and ideas from the primary text, interpretation and analysis support the arguments. It concludes with how pandemic literature deals with terrific human experiences.

Keywords: Flee and flight, isolation, Kitikpa, responses, pandemic, piety and cults

¹ Corresponding author ,

² Co-author

Introduction

In the short story “The Sacrificial Egg” that deals with a pandemic, Chinua Achebe (1959) elucidates the scenario of all-round devastation by smallpox disease. The protagonist Julius experiences three events: the catastrophe in Umuru port, the warning of Janet’s Ma, and his stepping on sacrificial eggs in the story. The story portrays the tragedy and disruption of Umuru Port or Nkwo under the threat of a weeklong lockdown and curfew administration. Traditionally, the name of the market comes after the Nkwoeity Mammy-Wota for its natural and lively commercial activities of two communities, Igbo forest folks and riverian Olu people. They used to carry their agricultural products, sell them, and buy others as per their needs. Because of such a traditional connection with the deity, people call the day Nkwo day and the market Nkwo market and port. After colonial intervention, the pandemic smallpox “leaves the market to the flies” (Achebe, P. 6). The four days of a week- Nkwo, Eke, Oye, and Afo-become equally Nkwo day for commercial activities. People suffer from the ‘progress’ of commercialization and Christianization. Commercialization disrupts economic phenomena, and Christianization shakes the very foundation of cultural and social activities in their indigenous life. The Christian convert characters like Julius, Janet, and her Ma seem doubtful of indigenous traditions and practices. The wrongheaded youngsters disobey their elders and revel and irritate their local deities. Due to the anger of the evil deity Kitikpa, she turns to smallpox pandemics and dismantles the Nkwo market activities. Concerning the backdrop, this paper critically examines how Chinua Achebe’s short story “The Sacrificial Egg” portrays disturbances of social adherence by smallpox disease and pandemic responses against it. The highly contagious disease casts its strength to turn the busy port into a ‘vast emptiness’ and pushes people into private space relegation.

The pandemic shocks and shakes human dignity and the foundation of human activities. Being a pandemic of human concern, it renders its presence in art and literature. “The Sacrificial Egg” as a literary creation has received various criticisms. Afejuku and Mamudu (2012) observe social, familial, and interpersonal dislocation in the story, Maruti and Vijaya(2014) emphasize the representation of cultural hybridity after colonization in the story, Chang (2022) highlights ecological collapse, and Sharma (2024) accentuates the smallpox pandemic as a symbol of colonization. The discussions of the available critics render why this paper must analyze critically from the perspective of pandemic responses. The horror and terror seem rampant due to the smallpox pandemic rather than the cultural and economic loss of colonial interventions. I find this gap as a researchable issue. After the bursting of the smallpox pandemic through Umuru port, its devastation seems rampant. It analyses the responses like flee and flight; rituals and violence; piety and cults of saints; and quarantine, social distancing, and lockdown against the smallpox pandemic. Special attention goes to Frank M. Snowden and Jennifer Cooke for their ideas from a pandemic response perspective.

Literature Review

Worldwide read and translated Chinua Achebe enjoys criticisms over his literary creation. He remains famous for his magnum opus *Things Fall Apart* (1958). In addition, the other two books *No Longer at Ease* (1960) and *Arrow of God* (1964), make the African Trilogy. One of Achebe’s short stories “The Sacrificial Egg” has attracted critics’ attention from the world.

Chinua Achebe expresses and experiments his short stories in the context of oral tradition. Ode Ogede (2001) analyses his stories in the oral tradition with the characteristics of direct address, exaggeration, didacticism, digression, hyperbole, allusion, symbolism, etc. Assuring literary devices of oral tradition, Ogede highlights that Achebe’s stories convey “the theme of the unpredictability of life” (p.3). The protagonist in the story, Julius Obi, meets a deadly destiny. While returning from the river bank, he steps on sacrificial eggs offered at the crossroad of Umuru Market. The local deity Kitikpa sought revenge over his unclaimed action. After the breaking of eggs, he hears afflictions on Janet and her Ma by smallpox. In this regard, Ogede accentuates “In a story dominated by traditional fatalism, there is an indication that one’s destiny cannot be averted” (p. 4). The egg represents a sign of

misfortune ahead to the disobeyers and disturbers. However, the protagonist and others take it superstitiously due to their Christian conversion. The breaking egg parallels the deadly disease as the cause-and-effect relation in the story. Similarly, Lewis (2015) praises Achebe as an interpreter of the African past from within. He has fulfilled two responsibilities: one of writing in foreign language and another being faithful to tribal people. He deserves respect for, “The interpretation of the African past from within. He has solved the problem of interpreting this past in a foreign language and the responsibilities and obligations of the writer to his own people” (p. 62). He became the one who speaks for Africa as an African. He defies the trend of Europeans writing about Africa and presenting African experiences in totally mediated form.

Besides social and cultural dislocation caused by hybridity, pandemic diseases also bring the same fate. The critics Afejuku and Mamudu (2012) observe disease as a cause of social dislocation in the story collection *Girls at War*. The disease becomes a medium to distort and destroy the usual social relationships among people in the community. These critics observe smallpox disease as the personification of Kitikpa, an evil deity. The strength of Kitikpa disrupts and destroys the relationship with and within the villagers. They mention “Interpersonal social relationships are affected, thus rendering the community, socially dislocated” (p. 118). The disease keeps Julius Obi himself away from the contact of his beloved Janet and her Ma. Even if after anyone passes away, s/he cannot organize and attain the funeral procession. The story gives no sign of his contact and communication during his relegation to private space. The critics further emphasize, “Achebe has effectively illustrated the ravaging effect of disease on the individual, family, and community” (118). The disrupting disease has distorted relationships among friends, families, and lovers in the story. Apart from breaking interpersonal relationships, the disease stops economic activities too.

Cultural hybridity as a facet of multiculturalism makes people forget some established traditions and follow new influences in daily life. The hybrid personality inherits various cultural tenets and stands nowhere. The conflict surfaces due to the cultural hybridity. The hybrid personality becomes psychologically weaker and culturally nowhere. S/he cannot decide properly in a crucial and critical time. The critics Maruti and Vijaya (2014) emphasize “*The Sacrificial Egg* by Chinua Achebe is a story that highlights the conflict between African Civilization and Westernization” (p.7). Being Umuru too commercial and contaminated after colonial jeopardy, Umuru people disrespect traditional activities. Kitikpa, the god of smallpox surveys the village to establish the order. Those who break the vows and neglect their responsibilities, Kitikpa punishes their life. The commercial and cultural hybridity makes people doubt and disobey the warnings of the gods. They undermine the power of the evil deity. Likely the protagonist Julius lingers on the river bank despite the warnings by Ma. He becomes strange in both cultures. Maruti and Vijaya envisage “He fails to understand that the outbreak of smallpox in Umuru is a revenge of the God, Kitikpa. After having a Missionary education, he looks at all these traditional beliefs as outdated and superstitions” (p. 8). As encouraged by churches and schools, Julius overlooks traditional belief systems and labels them superstitiously outdated. Both critics share the common sentiment that hybridity caused by colonialism polluted social, cultural, economic, ecological, and spiritual dimensions.

Besides cultural conflicts between colonizers and colonized in Nigeria, Hawk Chang (2022) observes representations of environmental disturbances in Achebe's ‘The Sacrificial Egg’. He writes “Achebe displays how a precious African land in harmony with nature has been replaced by a chaotic world teeming with filth, disease, and congestion” (p.2). Chang notices colonial interventions responsible for ecological imbalance in the Umaru port at the bank of River Niger. He finds Achebe’s ecological consciousness in the line of anticolonial perspectives. Along with colonization, the unpolluted land and rivers become the means of exploitation for commercialization. Chang analyses

instruments like the typewriter and weighing machine as symbols “to exploit the natural resources in Nigeria” (p. 2). Along with economic movement and civilizing missions, these tools also work as a means of environmental exploitation.

Umuru place and people suffer from Western colonization and smallpox disease simultaneously. Before colonial intervention in Nigeria, it was free from such pandemics. Sharma (2024) represents smallpox as a symbol of Western contamination. The sons of the soil bear cultural, economic, and religious suffering from the greedy colonialism in Umuru place. Likewise, they suffer from smallpox disease too. He accentuates “The main cause of the disease is the colonizers’ encroachment and their greed. The symbolic disease stands for colonial evil that affects the African continent” (p.1). Likely colonialism empties traditional values and traditions, Julius bears psychological emptiness after the contagious ‘decoration’ of his beloved Janet and her Ma. He becomes a limbo in a loss of everything. Sharma highlights “His previous confidence disappears and fear collapses him” (p.4). Learned culture and education subdue and mask his previous indigenous respect for the deities. The disease as a ‘decorated artist’ sheds fear over him. Previously he ignored the warnings about the spirit due to his education and cultural hybridity. However, his disobedience pays a price of loss and the life of Janet and her Ma. Samatar (1998) highlights the aspect of disintegration in "The Sacrificial Egg" rather than hybridity. He notes, “It is a story of disintegration rather than hybridization” (p. 62). The story presents the chaotic condition of Umuru because of the disintegration of the people. As a result of such division, they belong to nowhere.

From these available reviews of the primary text, analysis from a pandemic perspective seems untouched academically. This paper aims to fill the gap. In other words, it assesses how people respond to pandemic diseases. Pandemics disrupt casual activities and cause life loss. The loss itches deep down to the heart of the people. The memories and traumatic experiences spill over the literary genre and turn into a terrain for academic criticism.

Methods and Materials

This inquiry paper employs a qualitative research design to examine responses to the devastating smallpox pandemic. It accesses data from primary and secondary sources. The selected text “The Sacrificial Egg” by Chinua Achebe belongs to pandemic fiction and the responses to its catastrophic disturbances. To deal with the devastation and responses to the smallpox pandemic, this inquiry discusses the effects of disease, and flee and flight; ritual cleansing; piety and cult; quarantine isolation of characters as response issues in the story. After experiencing fear and terror during the pandemic, the suffering people responded in various ways. Besides the primary text, this paper deals with other books, journal articles, and online sources as secondary materials. Critical analysis and interpretative methods have been used for the analysis of textual data using a pandemic response perspective.

Theoretical Mapping

This study uses plague pandemics and human responses to them as theoretical tools for the critical observation of the primary text. The spreading of the pandemic raises the risk of bioterror among the inhabitants. People respond to plague in an unorganized manner first and systematically later. Plague pandemics occur due to bacterial transmissions from rodents to humans. Due to its infinitely contagious nature, it flares up and results in a bioterror within human beings. Snowden (2019) illustrates “Finally, there is the ever-present danger of a man-made epidemic of plague through an act of bioterror. This occurred in China at the hands of the invading Japanese Army” (58) during the Cold War. It cues the spreading of the pandemic plague in China, resulting from colonization. He envisions responses to the plague on three levels: Spontaneous Responses, Public Health Responses, and an Assessment. Within Spontaneous responses to the Plague, flee and flight become the first and the most universal response. He mentions, “During the Great Plague of London in 1665-1666, wave after wave of people panicked

and fled the city for their lives” (59). He also illustrates the flight of people from Naples in 1656. The visitation of the plague destroyed nearly half of the population there. The decision to flee accords with the medical understanding of the people. The disease constructs a social mindset that makes sense to flee from the situation.

To be safe from the upcoming calamity with a contagious disease, people follow certain measures. They stop public contact and regulate their daily activities cautiously. They pay more attention to internal and familial concerns. In this respect, Snowden underscores “They collected refuse, closed certain workshops and trades, swept the streets, halted work in abattoirs, and ordered the prompt burial of corpses” (60). They also follow the purification process of air, water, and land by water, fire, smoke, and aromatic agents like smoke, fire, gunpowder, etc. People wear plague costumes and hats, and staff. People strengthen the inner defense of the body by avoiding depleting emotions like the use of talismanic things, metals, rubies, diamonds, and reassurance of a certain number. Again, Snowden mentions “In such perilous circumstances, it was important to avoid depleting emotions such as fear, distress, and melancholia; to eat and drink sparingly; to avoid excesses or sexual exertion; and to guard against sudden chills and drafts” (p 62). Strengthening inner defenses against disease disruption, the authorities and people organize external defenses too.

As an external defense, Ritual Cleansing and violence are associated with the notion of sin and divine punishment. The communities surrender to spiritual presence. They follow traditional rituals and rites to calm down the dangers. Snowden mentions “The death-inducing sin could be the abuse of food and drink; excessive sleep or idleness; immoderate, unnatural, or sinful sex; or blasphemous religious practices and beliefs. Those guilty of offending God should be found and punished” (p. 62). In human history, during pandemics, minorities, foreigners, and women are made guilty of offending the gods. The Flagellants diverted their penitential violence onto the bodies of Jews too. Snowden iterates “Jews were guilty in the minds of many not only of killing Jesus but also a conspiracy to annihilate Christianity with the plague” (p.65). People thought they were responsible for the plague. In 1349, on Valentine's Day, the Italian authorities blamed Jews for poisoning wells to spread the pestilences. The authorities forced them to either convert or burn alive at the cemetery. However, they develop ways to propitiate the anger of God.

Piety and Plague Cults as a less murderous response to the plague tries to propitiate the anger of divinity by contrition, penitence, rogations, and confessions to a holy shrine. During the time of the Black Death, the Flagellants started a collective movement of asceticism to appease God and Christendom. Snowden mentions “To appease God and Christendom, the Flagellants took a bow that for the duration of their pilgrimage they would not bathe, change clothes or communicate with anyone to the opposite sex” (p.65). They set off for a day's pilgrimage. On the way, they whipped on their backs with leather thongs, bore wooden crosses, beat each other, and lay for public humiliation for an epidemic halt.

Plague Cults intercede between the sufferers and saints. Snowden talks about the establishment of cults during the plague time. The cult of Saint Sebastian, Saint Roch, and the Virgin Mary intercede on behalf of suffering humankind. They represent a cult for diverting the plague on himself and a pilgrim Saint. The last Saint Virgin Mary receives a special prayer for her contribution to the receding of pestilence. The Venetian Senate built a great Church to respect “Virgins’ act of mercy in restoring Venice to health (Snowden, P.68). The cults became historical, cultural, and religious spectrum later. The Venetians organize a procession once a year in her name and memory.

Public Health Responses represent an institutional, organized, systematic antiplague response to prevent pandemic return. Being aware of recurring diseases in human history, the people and authorities seem serious about experiments to deal with the pandemic devastation. In this regard, Coke

(2009) considers responses to plague pandemics on two levels. One refers to institutional reaction and the other to inflicted anarchy and hedonism. The emergency as an institutional reaction, it sanctions severe control over every activity. In the second the inflicted people practice crime, riot, drunk, and rebellious freedom. Although people's authorities lacked the medical measures and understanding of the governing diseases. All the major powers blocks like legislative, judicial, and executive powers jointly act under the institutional framework of the health magistrate during the pandemic time.

With unlimited legal authority and the primary goal of preserving the community from pandemic invasion and stopping its further spreading, lazarettos, quarantine, and isolation work as an institution. Further, the authority may stop all activities like transportation, public gatherings, pilgrimage, trade, labor migration, and meetings; keep in isolation from contact; and lockdown in more affected areas. Snowden iterates "Quarantine thus presupposed the economic, administrative, and military resources of the state" (p. 71). As per the need, the authorities seal the boundaries and borders. During quarantine periods, the authorities exercise military activities under sanitary cordons. Snowden highlights "Sanitary cordons were military barriers intended to protect a territory by halting all overland movement of goods, people, and therefore diseases until quarantine could demonstrate that they were medically safe" (p.72). During the quarantine time, the authorities make direct observations, keep emergencies on high alert, and increase or decrease lockdown days. The rules and regulations focus on a living first attitude.

The Human Responses to the Pandemic

Art and literature provide an inclusive platform to express all sorts of human experiences and emotions. The outbreak of pandemic calamities destroys and devastates order in society, nation, or the world. It gets a place in the human mind and expression in art and literature. Jennifer Cooke (2009) explores, "Legacy of Plague especially examines the three areas: literature, theory, and film" (p. 11). The receding of the pandemic increases deposition in human memory as a form of hurt and pain. Cook further scrutinizes, "When Europe's last plague epidemic died out, plague's place has been in fiction. With authors reworking and reimagining its outbreaks in their narratives and novels" (p. 16). Art and literature give space to the experiences and feelings to be expressed creatively. The literary expression remains touchier than the algorithm. The memory of the pandemic's horrifying consequences has a place in literature. David A. Davis (2011) analyses Porter's novel *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* as a traumatic memory of the pandemic Influenza 1918. He iterates, "The interplay between death and memory in *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* gives an aesthetic dimension to the pandemic's horrifying consequences and raises questions about literature as a form of traumatic memory" (p. 55). The protagonist Miranda endures nightmares fitfully. The horrific experiences turn into traumatic to give aesthetic flavor.

Similar to Coke's indication, Chinua Achebe's "The Sacrificial Egg" deals with the smallpox pandemic in literary form. The protagonist Julius retrieves a week-long devastation, a conversation with Janet and her Ma, and his horrific flight after stepping on the sacrificial eggs at the crossroad. These events hurt him now in his memory. The nightmarish remembering and forgetting of horrifying situations deepen his 'vast emptiness'. Achebe depicts a horrifying situation in his story with a storytelling technique. This disease performs devastating dances in various sectors like culture, society, transportation, and commerce.

Jennifer Cooke considers plague as a fatal disease that causes sickness and finally kills life. Examining legacies of plagues in human history, Cooke navigates around influences on human concerns. It has offered platforms such as the advancement of medical and epidemiological theories, textual and metaphoric constructions, and social and political dimensions in discussions. She iterates, "Plague wielded as a political or rhetorical weapon in the service of social discrimination or stigmatization; it is mobilized to critique regions, dictators or minority groups" (p.2). Achebe's story *The Sacrificial Egg* blames Westernization for Umuru's calamity as 'progress'. The progress refers to

Western intervention in the economy and culture, smallpox represents the outcome of Western contact, and Smallpox is the result of the contact. Plague/ Smallpox represents a 'sick' or 'healthy body' metaphor. As well, it turns to social and political rhetoric. Likely to coronavirus as Trump's Chinese Virus, and Aids as the 'Gay Plague', Cooke renders awareness about the stigmatization and politicization of diseases. Cooke further illustrates "This dramatic response survived to reappear in Hitler's accusations against and measures for dealing with the Jewish Plague" (p.3). Political stigmatization goes to 'others'. Chinua Achebe considers Western colonization responsible for the spread of smallpox disease. However, the colonizers are devoid of physical assault as described by Cooke and Snowden.

Indigenous people regulate economic activities almost in a bartering system. The Nkwo market or port in Umuru represents a common place for the forest people Igbo and river people Olu by the Anambara River. Igbo Calendars presupposes four days in a week, seven weeks in a month, and thirteen months in a year. The week spreads into- Nkwo, Eke, Oye, and Afo -days. From the time of antiquity, the Nkwo market owes to "The deity who had presided over it from antiquity" (Achebe, p. 7). The deity Mummy-wota, an old woman who stands in the middle of the market, waves in four directions, and invites people from distant places. On Nkwo day, the Umuru people sell and buy goods they need. Achebe illustrates that the people used to come with "palm oil and kernels, kola nuts, cassava, mats, baskets, and earth ware pots; and took home many-colored clothes, smoked fish, iron pots and plates" (p. 5). It reveals natural and traditional business modality before the 'encroachment'. However, it has changed into a busy market after the intervention.

After the western encroachment, the economic, commercial, social, cultural, and interpersonal devastation presided over Umuru port. Achebe reminds the readers "All-powerful European trading company which brought palm-kernels at its own price and sold cloth and metal ware, also at its own price" (p. 6). These lines indicate a shocking scenario of colonial monopoly. European companies, chief clerks, and weighing machines represent economic encroachment over the traditional Nigerian market in the name of civilization and progress. Achebe further iterates "With the coming of civilization and growth of the town into a big palm-oil port" (p. 5). The Nkwo market spreads over four days of activities. Previously the market used to be busy only on Nkwo day of the week. Achebe criticizes, "The strangers who came to Umuru came for trade and money, not in search of duties to perform" (p.6). It exemplifies their vested interests. Smallpox disease seems to be a by-product of their commercial monopoly, though it strikes them back.

People try to find the sinner communities responsible for the disaster. In the story, European intruders, Julius, Janet, and her Ma seem responsible for the degradation of the Umuru place. They meet punishment differently. "Thus a city besieged by a major plague epidemic becomes a perfect dystopia" (Snowden, p. 78). Europeans lose their business, two women lose their lives, and Julius loses his family bond and earns only the 'vast emptiness'. Snowden mentions who the suspicious sinners are responsible for the tragedy. The affected people consider 'others' guilty of offending God and inviting disaster on faithful people. Besides prostitutes, lepers, and beggars, he mentions "Religious dissenters, foreigners, and witches were also attacked" (P. 63) by the communities. In a similar vein, Julius acts in a blasphemous role denouncing his spiritual practices. He follows churches and the Western education that makes him in-between and doubtful. He is severely punished for 'emptiness' in family relations and his cultural heritage. He acts as a teaser to Kitikpa and bears the punishment of loss. As Sharma writes, the anxious ingenious communities consider European intervention as the source of the overwhelming calamity.

Besides, Umuru places and people bear cultural, social, and educational pollution. In the name of civilization and progress, the people lost and empty of everything. Achebe highlights "But progress

had turned it into a busy, sprawling, crowded and dirty river port, a no-man's-land where strangers outnumbered by far the sons of the soil, who could do nothing about it except shake their heads at this gross perversion of their prayer" (p. 6). These lines signal gross perversion in the name of progress and Christianization. 'The sons of the soil' face overpopulation, ecological degradation, and dislocation in their homeland. The children encouraged by churches and education follow and behave like 'strangers'. Achebe examines the all-round degradation of Umuru's place and people. The land seems like 'no-man's-land' and 'the son of the soil' does nothing except accept and shake their heads for the prayers of strangers. Furthermore, Achebe concludes "Such was the state of the town when Kitikpa came to see it" (p.6). Achebe personifies smallpox to Kitikpa, the traditional evil deity of the Umuru people.

Along with various interventions of the Westerners in Umuru land, the smallpox pandemic decimates and empties the busy port. Julius observed and wondered at the empty market down from the European trading company window. Julius questions and answers himself "Who would have believed that the great boisterous market could ever be quenched like this? But such was the strength of Kitikpa, the incarnate power of smallpox. Only he could drive away all those people and leave the market to the flies" (Achebe, p. 6). Achebe personifies the smallpox disease to the traditional evil deity Kitikpa. The smallpox disease drives away the motion of the market. It hands over the market under the rules of flies.

First of all, the people suffering from the pandemic feel fear and flee from the pandemic. Julius responds with fear and flees against the devastating disease. Achebe narrates, "He wiped the sole of his foot on the sandy path and hurried away, carrying another vague worry in his mind" (p.7). After the meeting with his beloved Janet and her Ma, Julius goes to the river bank. He regrets Ma's fear and warning about the spreading of smallpox. He walks there aimlessly for refreshment. He ignores Ma's warning about the meeting with the evil deity Kitikpa at night at the crossroads and his evil influences. Julius is represented as a limbo "Being educated he was not afraid of whom he might meet" (Achebe, p.7). The night-masked revelers irritate and excite the Kitikpa deity of his Nkwo day. The strangers and Christians convert suppose this a superstition. However, the traditional consciousness gives him a 'vague worry' that some misfortune may happen. His worries heighten when he steps on and breaks the sacrificial egg.

The pandemic eruption disrupts the life of all living beings. As fear of death rules, the social and interpersonal rules work no more. Boccaccio (2004) depicts horror and terror in his book *The Decameron*. He narrates "that in horror brother thereof brother was forsaken by a brother, nephew by an uncle, brother by a sister, and often times husband by wife, irony what is more, and scarcely to be believed, fathers and mothers were found to abandon their own children" (p. 8). The love of personal life forgets everyone. Julius retrieves the memory of meeting with Janet and her Ma sitting by the window of the company building helplessly. Against the backdrop of Boccaccio's narration of horror, Julius loses his would-be wife Janet and her Ma. Both depict the breaking of boundaries, hierarchies, differences, and socially established bonds.

After fear and flight from the terror of the smallpox pandemic, people respond to it with piety and pandemic cults. The Umuru people worship, follow, and vow to the deity. People who want to get rid of misfortune offer eggs to the deity at the crossroads, the place of life and death. Achebe narrates "Kitikpa came to see it and to demand the sacrifice the inhabitants owed the gods of the soil" (p. 6). This line indicates that Umuru inhabitants owe evil deities to establish order and safety. In response, people sacrifice eggs. The deity renders life punishment to the offenders. Julius calls it a superstitious activity. However, his traditional mindset is "carrying another vague worry in his mind" (Achebe, p. 7). He worries about the bad influence and revenge of evil deities over people. It indicates fear of Kitikpa, who generally punishes revelers and disobeyers. Julius too disobeys and ignores his power, since his influence from the churches and education. Consequently, he ignores Ma's warning about the

misfortunes. Achebe clarifies “Those he killed were not killed but decorated” (p.6). To be safe from the ‘decoration’, the Umuru people used to offer eggs to the deity. It represents piety and cults for the appeasement of the deity.

Furthermore, the spreading of the smallpox pandemic deploys people in quarantine, isolation, and social distancing. Julius retrieves his conversation with Janet and her Ma a week ago. Achebe narrates “Julius was sad and worried because it was almost a week since he had seen Janet, the girl he was going to marry” (p. 70). It portrays a strictly shocking situation of isolation and social distancing. In times of difficulty, they are without contact. Likewise, Julius observes his typewriter, his boss snoring at his table, the gatekeeper sleeping at the post, an empty basket on the weighing machine, and the ruling of dust and flies around. Snowden compares death silence with death punishment. He iterates, “Confinement was therefore widely regarded as a death sentence to be served alone and forcibly cut off from friends and family” (p. 74). Similar to Boccaccio and Snowden, family disruption is shocking in Achebe's story. Julius stays cut off from his beloved Janet and her Ma.

This scenario of lockdown and motionless port represents people in quarantine. Achebe further clarifies “No customer had passed through the gate for nearly a week” (p.5). The pandemic catastrophe ceases all the activities, economic, transportation, and interpersonal meetings. In this regard, Snowden compares confinement with a death sentence cut off from relatives. He expresses, “Anti plague regulations, therefore, banned funerals, processions, and the final attentions of laying out and viewing the body” (p. 77). Because of fear of contamination, the authorities keep people away from contact and ceremonies. During pandemics, the disease pays a discount on everything and everyone. The experiences of vast emptiness increased between decorated Janet and her Ma, and himself in the company room. Julius seems to be devoid of a proper burial ceremony for “Ma and Janet whom the dread artist decorated” (Achebe, p.8). The pandemic rules and reels casual life in its fashion. Living people suffer from fear, loneliness, and loss of relatives during pandemics.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this inquiry paper envisions the cataclysm of the smallpox pandemic in Chinua Achebe's short story “The Sacrificial Egg”. The Umuru people at River Niger suffer from its devastation and respond against it. The Nkwo place and people undergo multiple sufferings. Nkwo place as a confluence of forest folks and riverian people turns into a busy port suffering from colonial encroachment and turns into a busy port. A peaceful and natural market for selling and buying for household goods and foods has become a highly commercialized Umuru port. After their intrusion, the European intruders purchase local products and sell theirs at their price. The large weighing machine, company clerk, and typewriter represent the colonial presence to sweep traditional and Indigenous activities into ‘vast emptiness’. Likewise, people follow churches and their education under civilization's mission. They suffer from multiple hybridity. The new generation under the cultural, educational, and religious guidance of civilization started to disobey their elders, and seniors and disrespect their Indigenous Mammy-wota and Kitikpa deity presiding over from antiquity. The local people believe the deities carry misfortune to the blasphemous and are benign and beneficial to the followers. The local people consider the smallpox pandemic due to the Kitikpa incarnation.

Achebe makes a caution to the people about cult and piety to the deities, and after the pandemic. Against pandemic disruption, people respond variously. They fly and flee, strengthening bodily, familial, and cultural precautions. The governmental cordons overshadow democracy and freedom of the people. They follow medical rules, remain in social isolation, and lockdown. Achebe highlights fabrics of pandemic responses against the smallpox disease. In this respect, this story illustrates the significance of pandemic literature in expressing human experiences and feelings of terror. Other than literature cannot express acute memory and traumatic reflections. Furthermore, this paper encourages the researchers who ponder over the aftermath of life and their experiences. This paper theorizes

pandemic responses in the story to set precautions and normative applications to address human experiences in calamities. It suggests this story as a trauma study for further inquiry.

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Authors' Bio-note

Udaya Chandra Chapai is a Faculty of English Department at Dhawalagiri Multiple Campus, Tribhuvan University (TU). He is pursuing PhD from TU under the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. His area of research is Eastern Philosophy

Prakash Sharma is a Faculty of English Department at Dhawalagiri Multiple Campus, Tribhuvan University (TU). He is pursuing PhD from TU under the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. His area of interest is Environmental Studies.

Contribution

Udaya Chandra chapagain: Conceptualization and preparation of manuscript

Prakash Sharma: Checking manuscript and refining the paper