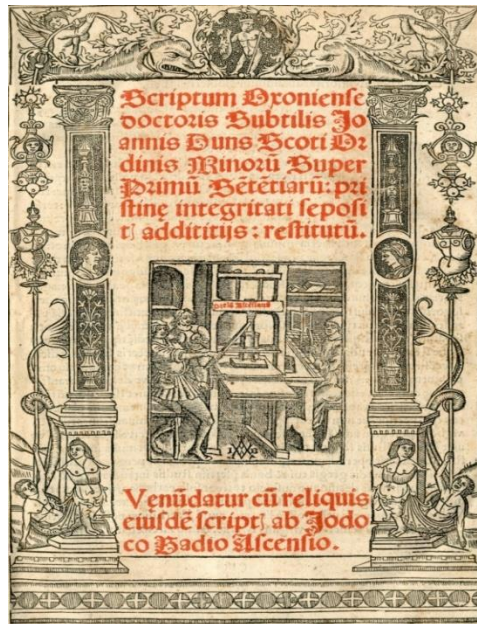


# LES INCUNABLES

*Revue congolaise des sciences de l'information  
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# THE WORLD OF CONFLICTS IN CHINUA ACHEBE'S ARROW OF GOD

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**Abstract :** *The object of this article is to analyze the conflictual features of Chinua Achebe's Arrow of God. As a historian of his time, Achebe presents the image of conflicts within a particular historical background of the Iboland in his fictional world. In fact, the opposition between characters makes Arrow of God a conflictual novel. Indeed, Achebe's Arrow of God reveals the dramatic world of conflicts opposing Ezeulu the chief priest of Ulu and the British captain T.K. Winterbottom, Ezeulu and his clan and God, Umuaro and Okperi, and the conflict within Ezeulu's family. In other words, the novel reveals the conflict prevailing between the Ibo ruling system and culture against the western's administration and culture. As for the scientific interest, the psychological and sociological approaches are of great help.*

**Key words :** Conflictful features, image, historical background, dramatic, Iboland, fictional world.

**Résumé :** *L'objet de cet article est d'analyser les caractéristiques conflictuelles dans le roman Arrow of God de Chinua Achebe. En tant qu'historien de son temps, Achebe présente l'image des conflits dans un contexte historique particulier du territoire Ibo dans sa fiction. En fait, l'opposition entre les personnages fait d'Arrow of God un roman conflictuel. En effet, Arrow of God révèle le monde dramatique des conflits opposant Ezeulu le prêtre d'Ulu et le capitaine britannique TK Winterbottom, Ezeulu et son clan et Dieu, Umuaro et Okperi, ainsi que le conflit au sein de la famille d'Ezeulu. En d'autres termes. Ce roman révèle le conflit qui prévaut entre le système de gouvernement Ibo et la culture contre l'administration et la culture occidentales. En ce qui concerne l'intérêt scientifique, les approches psychologiques et sociologiques sont d'une grande importance.*

**Mots clés :** caractéristiques conflictuelles, image, l'historique, dramatique, territoire Ibo, monde imaginaire.

## Introduction

The coming of the white man in Africa has brought about many conflicts which have deeply inspired many writers. It is for example the case of the Kenyan writer Ngugi Wa Thiong'o whose two first published novels : *Weep not Child* and *the River Between* are dominated by various conflicts. It is also the case of the Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe whose novel, *Arrow of God* is our main concern in this study. This article studies conflicts in Achebe's *Arrow of God*. According to the *Webster's New World Dictionary*, the term conflict refers to "a fight, quarrel or any context or a sharp disagreement or opposition as of interests or ideas". In the present case, by conflict, we refer to emotional disturbance resulting from a clash of opposing impulses or from an inability to reconcile impulses with realistic or moral consideration. It is in this acceptance that we are going to deal with our subject matter. It sounds that, through the opposition between a certain number of characters, *Arrow of God* would be a conflictful novel. Regarding Achebe's writings, there is a plethora of criticisms on them. Furthermore, Achebe's novels still seem attractive and criticisms on them are still seem continual. Thus, our scientific interests in adding something on what others have already found out. However, our matter is to analyze how Achebe succeeds to combine fiction and the Ibo historical background in his *Arrow of God*. Then, what is the nature of conflicts in Achebe's *Arrow of God* ? The answer to this question will be given through the studies of Christianity and Ibo traditional religion, conflict within Ezeulu's family, Ezeulu's inclination against the will of God, Ezeulu and his clan, and Umuaro against Okperi. In this respect, G. D. Killam (1977 : 61) writes :

*Ezeulu is compelled to defend his unique position of priest of Ulu, the most powerful of the village deities against, on the one hand, reactionary forces within the tribe and, on the other, against European culture and religion.*

As for the methodology, we are going on the first hand, to resort to the psychological approach and on the second hand, the sociological approach.

### 1. The Christianity and the Ibo Traditional Religion

The antagonism between Christianity and Ibo traditional religion would be demonstrated through the new converts or Christians' behaviour against traditional religious or system and the way, the white man is using to gain new converts from and among Ibo. In fact, among the Ibo people, there are many taboos that must be observed and respected. It is the case for example of the notorious "ifu muo" taboo forbids a woman to go out and see masquerade. This is what Taiwo Oladele (1967 : 134) confirms :

*A woman seen peering or making attempt to see a masquerade is cursed and she may become barren forever. There are things which people are forbidden to do for fear of dreadful consequences and if they believe all they are told their lives become very much circumscribed by rigid laws ?*

To deal with this issue, apart from Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God*, we are also going to refer to Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* wherein, he also reveals the conflict opposing the traditional religion to the Christianity in Iboland so as to illustrate or clarify this religious conflict. But, before gaining a deep view into this conflict, it would be to our advantage to note that, the Ibo have various religious beliefs and a religious system which involves a complex hierarchy of gods and deities. Each deity has its symbol as it is the case of python, the symbol of Idemili to which the Ibo respect. Yet, above all, the greatest of all gods is Chukwu the Supreme God. However, the introduction of Christianity into the Iboland including scholar institutions of catechist, and hospitals hastened the disintegration of all traditional heritage. In this regard, Thomas Melone (1973 : 58) declares :

*Or l'arrivée des blancs, missionnaires et administrateurs, va précipiter la dissolution de tout ce patrimoine traditionnel. Qu'il s'agisse de la nouvelle religion, de la nouvelle administration avec tous ces circuits commerciaux et ses dispensaires...*

It is assumed that when the white man comes in Iboland with the Christian theory of the Omnipresence of god and asks the natives to leave their traditional religion which has wicked ways and false gods. Thus, he adds that, there is only one God who is invisible and is the only one who can judge people after death, so as to make Ibo to join Christianity :

*.... the true god lived on high and that all men when they die went before him for judgement. Evil men and all the heathen who in their blindness bowed to wood and stone were thrown into a fire that burned like palm. Oil. But good men who worshipped the true god lived for ever in his happy kingdom we have been sent by this great God to ask to leave your wicked ways and false gods. (Arrow of God, p.132)*

In addition to what precedes, in *Things Fall Apart*, Chinua Achebe also raises this issue through the conflict opposing Mr. Brown and one of the great men of Umuofia called Akunna. In fact, we learn that, Mr. Brown goes to visit Akunna and spends long hours with him in his house talking through interpreter about religion. In this connection, the following extract is illustrative :

*“ You say that there is one Supreme God who made heave and earth “, said Akunna on one of Mr. Brown’s visit. “ We also believe in him and call him Chukwu. He made all the world and the other gods “. There are no other gods, said Mr. Brown (...) our father knew that Chukwu was the Overlord and that is why many of them gave their children the name Chukwu. “ You said one interesting thing “, sayd Mr. Brown. In my religion Chukwu is a loving Father and need not be feard by those who do his will. But we must fear him when we are not doing his will, said Akunna. (Things Fall Apart, p.162-163)*

Through the above extract, we can deduce that, neither of them has succeeded in converting the other, but they have both learnt more about their different beliefs. In this way, Mr. Brown has just learnt a good deal about the religion of the clan. Furthermore, this conflict is intensified by the matter of the sacred python, the symbol of the god Idemili the divinity of the village Umunneora embodied by the chief priest Ezidemili. In fact, after settling in Iboland Christianity shows and urges children, new converts of Iboland to disregard and destroy the traditional religious system and kill totemic animals. In this connection, Eustache Palmer (1972 : 87) perfectly illustrates :

*But though Oduche decides to kill the python, he is still sufficiently steeped in his people’s lore to be terrified of the consequences. He therefore, decides to impression the python in the box Moses has made for him : “ The python would die for lack of air and he would be responsible for death without being guilty of killing it.*

Oduche, the new convert, has already learnt the white man’s science, and has adhered with conviction to the new religion and wants to show his Christian faith. Also, we realize that the new religion here, has attempted to stifle the life of the traditional religion or symbols. The act committed by Oduche, is only the act that the new religion is decided to completely annihilate the old religion. In addition, the new religion is very aggressive towards the traditional religious system, at the first time, it attracts children of Iboland to become its members, and in the second time however, it encourages those children, new converts to be more aggressive and destroy symbols of their parents as Eustache Palmer (1972 : 80) writes :

*However, the most aggressive and Zealous among the chritians are not the white missionaries themselves, but the black converts, men like the rigid fundamentalist Good-Country who encourages new adherents, not only to reject their own tradition but actively to destroy the shrines and other religious symbols of their people.*

The black converts and Good-Country's behavior, we mean the contemptuous of the beliefs and customs of the Ibo, is only a failure of intelligence and sensibility, and inability to interpret the word of God faithfully, and think that the best way to get success of the church is only to be more aggressive towards the old religious system and urge new converts to destroy symbols representing the old religion. *Things Fall Apart*, wherein Enoch, persuaded by the new faith, kills the sacred python. In addition, he unmasks the Egwugwu, something undone in the Iboland. The following extract is illustrative :

*One of them was Enoch, the son of the snake priest who was believed to have killed and eaten the sacred python. (...) One of the greatest crimes a man could commit was to unmask an Egwugwu in public, or to say or do anything which might reduce its immortal prestige in the eyes of the Uninitiated. And this was what Enoch did. (Things Fall Apart, p.167-168)*

The fact of destroying traditional religious symbols by Christians is considered by Ibo as an abomination. And this act is only the consequences of the introduction of the new religion into the Iboland. Thus, in the next section, the chief priest vision against his god will be examined.

## 2. Ezeulu's own Inclination against the Will of God

This conflict is essentially a debate about the limitation of his power. Ezeulu, the chief priest was elected to consolidate the unity of the village, by the six villages composing Umuaro. As such, his power is limited ; his solely function is to perform god's rituals and carry sacrifices to him. He also has the obligation to do it by year respecting the calendar of the year or each year. But Ezeulu is also doubtful about his personality, he is assiduously pursuing his task of looking for the new moon, considering the limits of his power as the extract below illustrates :

*Whenever Ezeulu considered the immensity of his power over the year and the crops and, there fore, over people he wondered if it was real. It was true he named the day for the feast of the pumpkin leaves and for the new yam feast ; but he did not choose the day. He was merely a watch man (...) no ! The chief priest of Ulu was more than that. (Arrow of God, p.3-4)*

We can notice that Ezeulu, the chief priest of Ulu is aware of being a mere interpreter of the clan and a mere agent of god in Umuaro. Therefore, the fact of being conscious of this reality makes him become anger and **conflictual** and leads him to follow his own will or vision against the will of his god. Later, we note that Ezeulu has given serious thought to do what none of his ancestors had dared. He is decided to challenge his clan and wrestle with his

own people instead of doing the will of his god. The following passage is a perfect illustration :

*You call this wrestling ? No, my clans man. We have not wrestled ; we have merely studied each other's hands. I shall come again, but before that I want to wrestle with my own people whose hand I know and who know my hand. I am going home to challenge all those who have been poking their fingers into my face to come outside their gate and meet me in combat, and whoever throws the other will strip him of his anklets. (Arrow of God, p.179)*

As a matter of fact, the above passage reveals the decision and position taken by Ezeulu to revenge not against the white man but against his own people ignoring to consult his god first. He thinks that his people are responsible for his arrest because they have been poking their fingers into his face so as to come out of Umuaro and meet the white man who invited him to be appointed as the chief warrant in Okperi. Therefore, concerning Ezeulu's position, Ulu has reacted by saying that, this is not Ezeulu's own fight, Ezeulu has to leave it be settled by himself with Idemili. The following speech is telling evidence :

*I say who told you that this was your own fight which you want the deity the way spirits do a dry skeletal laugh. "Beware you don't between me and my victim or you may receive blows not meant for you ! Go home and sleep leave me to settle my quarrel with Idemili who wants destroy me so that his python may come to power". (Arrow of God, p.191)*

We understand that since Ezeulu has decided to do things according to his own will, Ulu, the God of the clan wants to recall him to come back and see things as directed by himself God and not by his own way. Also, Ulu's reaction is due to the fact that Ezeulu here is arrogating to himself power that only his god could possess and arrogantly refusing to accept that he is merely an agent of the god. In this regard, Ezeulu's son Edogo also accuses his father who wants to behave himself just like a god while speaking about the problem of chief priest's succession. He says that the choice should be done by god himself and not by the fact that, the chief priest is not able to distinguish between what a man wants and what the priest of Ulu wants, or what the individual can and must do, and between what the representative of Ulu can and must do. In this respect, René Richard (1983 : 53) puts :

*In this connection, this is what Achebe analyses when he says : " of course, at times, the high priest tends to confuse his own thinking with that of Ulu. He does not make a difference between the man and the god".*

Evidently, we understand that, Ezeulu's own inclination against the will of his god is simply due to the fact that, he cannot distinguish or make a difference between his own way of thinking and that of his god who should lead him in a good way. To sum up, Ezeulu, the elected priest of Ulu, cannot realize that he is only an arrow in the bow of his god, and his failure to realize that, led him into nightmares. The exploration of *Arrow of God* reveals that there is also a conflict between Ezeulu and his clan, as we are going to notice in the following section.

### 3. Ezeulu and his Clan

The point of this conflict here is that, some of Ezeulu's actions might well look like betrayal from the people's point of view. That is to say, Ezeulu fails to put himself into the position of the people who elected him as a guardian of the clan, to see that from the clan point of view, some of his actions are considered like betrayals. Then, the first of his betrayal actions appears on the debate about the piece of land. In fact during this debate, the chief priest, the representative of the clan Umuaro claims that the land belonged to Operi. It was Operi people who gave us a piece of land to live in, they also gave us their deities and it is unjust to put hands in it. And then Ezeulu's declaration creates murmurs of approval and of disapproval, Nwaka, in the Assembly walks forward and back and declares that :

*My father told me a different story. He told me three or four different places where they sojourned for a while and moved on again. They were driven away by Umuofia, then Abame and Aninta. Would they go to day and claim all those sites ? (Arrow of God, p.16)*

In the same purpose, G. D. Killam (1977 : 61) writes :

*The former theme is centered in the rivalry between Ezeulu and Nwaka, a wealthy chief and principal supporter of Ezidemili, the chief priest of the god Idemili, one of the deities displaced by Ulu. This rivalry promotes internal division in the tribe.*

The atmosphere shows that Ezeulu is not for the clan position. It reveals how Nwaka, the great Orator has destroyed Ezeulu's speech so as to gain the majority and the consideration as the champion of people's cause. In addition, the second of his betrayal actions is when Ezeulu, the guardian of the traditional religion and system decides to tie friendship with the white man and send his son Oduche to join the white man's religion. In this regard, the following passage tells more :

*I want one of my son to join these people and be my eye there. If there is nothing in it you will come back. But if there is some thing*

*there, you will bring home my hare. The word is like a mask dancing. (Arrow of God, p.55)*

In the same way, Palmer Eustache (1979 : 98) aptly adds :

*Ezeulu who should have been the champion of his people's faith, becomes the agent of distruction.*

Assuredly, Ezeulu considers only his own opinion ; he does not care for people's opinions. Here, he decides to send his son Oduche to join the white man's religion without the approval of his clan or people who elected him as the leader of the clan. Moreover, the great manifestation of this conflict appears through the famine time gaining the whole clan Umuaro due to Ezeulu's own inclination or his own way of acting. In fact, the chief priest of Ulu brought into prison in Okperi, and ignorant of his misbehaviour towards the white man Winterbottom, thinks that he has been betrayed by his own people, and considers them as challenge or his great enemy. He then has decided to challenge his people. Also, when he is back from the prison, the clan suffers of hunger, but yams are ripe in the soil and must be harvested now. If they are not harvested, they will be eaten by the sun and evils.

However, the news of Ezeulu's refusal to call the New Yam Feast spread throughout Umuaro as rapidly as if it has been beaten out on the Ikolo, and people are completely stunned by it. Then, to avoid a disaster, ten men of high title decide to meet Ezeulu the chief priest's justification and ask him about the news spreading through the clan. None of the ten had taken fewer than three titles. The following passage is eloquent :

*I think that Ezeulu has spoken well. Everything he has said entered my ears. We all know the custom and no one can say that Ezeulu has offended against it. But the harvest is ripe in the soil and must be gathered now or it will be eaten by sun or the weevils. At the same time Ezeulu has just told us that he still has three sacred yams to eat from last year. What then do we do ? (Arrow of God, p.207)*

It can be said that the elders have decided to beg Ezeulu to eat more than one yam at the same time or day because, here it is an exceptional case, and could not go to Okperi when he was in prison and ask him to eat yam. That is why they were waiting for the coming of the chief priest of Ulu to fulfil his task. Despite elders' good will and the pity of the people's cause, Ezeulu replied negatively. In this connection, the extract below is enlightening :

*You have spoken well. But what you ask me to do is not done. Those yams are not food and a man does not eat them because he is hungry. You are asking me to eat death. (Arrow of God, p.207)*

We can figure out that, Ezeulu does not consider this moment as an exceptional one. And he thinks that this is the opportunity for him to hit Umuaro

at its most vulnerable point the “Feast of the New Yam“. So the fact that Ezeulu, disregards people’s opinion is the main source of this conflict against his clan. In this connection, Owen G. Mordaunt (1989 : 164) let us know this :

*The priest’s divination of the will of the god has set a course that could only lead to the destruction of the clan- but for the intervention of the church ... Ulu’s choice was between the clan and the priest... Ulu chose the clan, as it was his nature to do.*

We can end by saying that the Ibo village, in its inner, is really as a cell of social conflicts and fundamental tensions, and we have also realized that Ezeulu, the chief priest of Ulu is at the centre of all various conflicts. It also results that some of Ezeulu’s actions might look well like betrayal from the people’s point of view. That is to say, Ezeulu fails to put himself into the position of the people who elected him guardian of the clan. He decides to tie friendships with the white man and send his son Oduche to join the white man’s religion. Furthermore, tensions are also observable through Umuaro against Okperi : what is our concern in the next section.

#### **4. Umuaro and Okperi**

The conflict opposing the clan of Umuaro against Okperi is about the piece of land. We have different opinions within the clan of Umuaro from Ezeulu, the chief priest of Ulu and Nwaka the great and eloquent orator. In fact, Ezeulu, the chief priest of Ulu gives a testimony that the land belonged to Okperi ; and he adds that it is unjust to declare war against Okperi for it. Therefore, his Opponent, the master of speech “he was called by his friends”, Nwaka declares that the Okperi people are wanderers and they are given a place to live in after being driven away by Umuofia then by Abame and Aninta. This is what his father told him. In this connection, the passage below is telling evidence :

*My father told me a different story. He told me that Okperi people were wanderers. He told me three or four places they sojourned for a while and moved on again. They were driven away by Umuofia, then by Abame and Aninta. Would they go today and claim all those sites ? (Arrow of God, P.16)*

We can notice that, Nwaka destroys Ezeulu’s testimony and accuses him of betraying the clan in favour of Okperi people. Moreover, we learn that the military delegation going to Okperi, is led by non-experienced people. Thus, one of the clan elders called Egonnwane, tries to explain and recall the aim of this mission to the delegation by saying that it is not for war because

nobody eats war, but it is only for peace and recalls to the leader of the delegation namely Akukalia that, he has to cover the young men's faults. The following speech is enlightening :

*I want to speak to the men we are sending to Okperi. It is now along time since we fought a war and many of you may not remeber the custom. I am not saying that Akukalia needs to be reminded. But I am an old man, and an old man is there to talk (...) we do not want Okperi to choose war ; nobody eats war. (Arrow of God, p. 17-18)*

When we refer to the above speech, we understand that, the elders of Umuaro do not want war because they are experimented and they can appreciate the consequences of war as people of Abame are used to striking them. Thus, on the following day, Akukalia and his companion set out to Okperi and they arrive at the moment when all the people are at the Eke place of the market ; there, they meet only Uduezue who leads them to Otikpo, the public crier who is also preparing his seed yams in order to join the others to the Eke place. Here Akukalia refuses to eat the kola given by Otikpo because they have heavy loads on their heads. In this regard, the following extract serves as evidence :

*When they came back Otikpo brought a kola nut in wooden bow Akukalia thanked him but said that he and companions carried such heavy loads on their heads that they could neither eat or drink until the burden was set down. (Arrow of God, p.22)*

Assuredly the above quotation reveals us another face of the delegation at the difference of the delegation advised by Egonwane to be more cooperative. Also, we learn that Akukalia refuses to shake hands with people before delivering the message to the elders of Okperi and refuses to understand that the Okperi people including elders are all at the Eke place of the market. And what Ebo tells is seen and considered as insults for Akukalia and all what Ebo says makes him get nervous and he directly attacks Ebo ; the passage below is illustrative :

*Go back to your house shouted Akukalia or I will make you eat shit. If you want to shout like a castrated bull you must wait until you return to Umuaro. I told you this place is called Okperi. (Arrow of God, p.2)*

Evidently, here we realise an atmosphere of dispute and tension between the emissary of Umuaro and Ebo, the emissary of Okperi. This quarrel has led then to the fight, but Ebo is no much for Akukulia and soon he has had a broken head straming with blood-maddened by pain and shame in front of family. No wonder, he enters his house to get a matchet. Akukalia also after Ebo, goes into his house, takes the Ikenga from Ebo's shrine and split it in

two. For Ebo, it is an abomination and he goes into his Obi, takes his load gun and kills Akukalia with it. The passage below better illustrates our statement :

*Ebo pushed him aside and came into the Obi with his load gun. At the threshold he knelt down and aimed. Akukalia, seeing the danger, dashed forward. Although the bullet had caught him the chest he continued running with his machet held high until he fell at the threshold, his face hitting the low thatch before he went down. (Arrow of God, p.25)*

When Akukalia's body is brought home to Umuaro, people are very shocked and stunned because it had never happened before that an emissary of Umuaro has been killed abroad. People, after analyzing the situation resulting from the first shock favour Okperi and recognized the crime committed by their emissary Akukalia and say that their clansman has done an unforgivable thing. The passage below is enlightening :

*Let us put ourselves in the place of the man he made a corpse before his own eyes, they said. Who would bear such a thing ? What propitiation or sacrifice would atone for such sacrilege ? How would the victim set about putting himself right again with his father unless he could say them : Rest for the man that did it has paid his head. (Arrow of God, p.25)*

Diplomatically, Okperi people have failed. In fact, Okperi could have sent an emissary to inform Umuaro about what happened between Akukalia and Ebo, but nothing has been done. In this regard, Umuaro finds it an insult and four days after Akukalia's death, town-criers go through the six villages at night fall for a meeting to be held :

*Yet, when a man was killed something had to be said, some explanation given. That Okperi had not cared to say anything beyond returning the corpses was a mark of the contempt in which they now held Umuaro and that could not be overt looked. Four days after Akukalia's death criers went through the six villages at night fall. (Arrow of God, p.25-26)*

It appears clearly from the above passage that Umuaro is disappointed by Okperi lack of diplomacy and misbehaviour. Also, it reveals the people's will to gather the whole clan and take a common decision vis-à-vis Okperi way of behaving related to Akukalia's death. And, we also learn that Nwaka and his group or supporters have decided to fight against Okperi, in the Assembly because Okperi people have poured contempt on Umuaro as we can see from the following passage :

*We shall fight for our farmland and for the contempt Okperi has poured on us. Let us not listen to any one trying to frighten us with*

*the name of Ulu. And we have all heard how people of Aninta dealt with their deity when them. (Arrow of God, p.28)*

Nwaka and his group do not want the clan to be led by Ulu concerning this situation of war. Also, it is interesting to note that, the war is waged from one Afo to next, and on the day it begins Umuaro kills two men of Okperi. The next was Nkwo, and so there was no fighting. On the two following days “Eke” and “Oye”, the fighting grew fierce. Umuaro kills four men and Okperi replied with three, one of the three being Akukalia’s brother, Okoye. Also we learn that, the white man, Wintabota has brought soldiers to Umuaro to stop it. And he has asked his soldiers to gather all guns in Umuaro and break them publically, except three or four which he has carried away. At the end he sits in judgement over Umuaro and Okperi and gives the disputed land to Okperi. Yet, above all, we also learn that there exists a conflict between traditional authority and the white man administration.

## **5. The Traditional Authority and the White Man Administration**

This section deals with the conflict between the traditional authority and the white administration embodied by Ezeulu on one hand and Winterbottom on the other hand. But to gain an insight into this conflict, it would be advantageous to note that Ezeulu is the leader of the traditional administration ; he has been given the functions to rule the clan by the six villages composing Umuaro through the respect of rituals and the notion of yam. However, Winterbottom is a British colonial administrator ; he has been sent to Africa during the Cameroon campaign of 1916 to fight against the Germans and after defeating the Germans, he has been given the title of Captain as a reward. In this connection, the excerpt below is of great help :

*His strong belief in the British mission in Africa was, strangely enough, strengthened during the Cameroon Campaign of 1916 when he fought against the Germans that was how he had got the title of captain. (Arrow of God, p.36)*

Winterbottom, considered as a warrior is only a cog in the British administrative machine which includes some extremely, brutal and discourteous officials. In addition, when he settles in Iboland, he establishes friendship with the traditional administration through Ezeulu before showing his true face :

*Ezeulu has told us that the white ruler has asked him to go to Okperi. Now it is not clear to me whether is wrong for a man to as his friend to visit him. When we have a feast do not send for our friends in other clans to come and share it with us ?... The white man is Ezeulu’s friends and has sent for him. (Arrow of God, p.177)*

It seems clearly that, Ezeulu and Winterbottom are on good terms. Therefore, the conflict between them comes about when Winterbottom, the representative of the colonial administration, impressed by Ezeulu's behaviour and intelligence decides to appoint Ezeulu the Chief Supreme, that is to say, the official intermediary between the members of the clan and the British administration so as to impose, and spread the indirect Government in Iboland. And he sincerely thinks that he is doing the right thing. Unfortunately Ezeulu, the chief priest of Ulu, refuses the white man's proposal by saying : " Tell the white man that Ezeulu will not be anybody's chief, except Ulu ". It appears clearly that Ezeulu, the representative or the ruler of the traditional system, faithful to his functions, cannot leave his traditional functions given by the clan and serve the white man's administration.

Moreover, Ezeulu, the chief priest of Ulu, here is affirming the dignity and the autonomy of the traditional system or life, full of values. However, Winterbottom, in spite of his virtues, sees his authority affronted by a mere black man ; he then orders to arrest and imprisone Ezeulu. In this regard, the following passage is eloquent :

*Having made these detailed arrangements for the benefit of Ezeulu, Captain Winterbottom was under stably enraged when the messenger came back with the insulting reply from the self important fetish priest. He immediately signed in his capacity as magistrate for the apprehension of the priest and gave instructions for two policemen to go to Umuaro first thing and bring the fellow in. (Arrow of God, p.149)*

Evidently it appears that Winterbottom, one of the breeds of British administrators, wants to impose and spread by sheer forces the policy of indirect rule through Umuaro so as to end with the traditional system ruled by Ezeulu, and rule Iboland. It also shows how this conflict is intensified and precipitated. Then, it is interesting to note that, Ezeulu's arrest is also synonymous to disaster for the traditional administration, because he is the ruler and the only one who guides the clan, and since he is imprisoned, everything is also blocked in the clan, simply because nobody else can fulfil his task.

In addition to the conflict opposing the white administration to the Ibo traditional way of life, Chinua Achebe, in *Things Fall Apart*, also reveals how the leaders of Umuofia are arrested when they refuse to cooperate with the white man's administration :

*As soon as the six men were locked up, Court messengers went into Umuofia to tell the people that their leaders would not be released unless they paid a fine of two hundred and fifty bags of cowries...we will take leaders to Umuru before the big white man, and hang them.*

(*Things Fall Apart*, p. 176)

Assuredly, this passage reveals the humiliation and degradation to which the tribe is subjected and the contempt that the white man shows for traditional customs and dignity. And then, we can add that through the leaders' arrest, we realize both the arrogance and the insincerity of the new administration which disregards even elders' titles and imposes its own laws on them without trying to find out the nature of Ibo law and custom. These remarks lead us to examine in the following section another important conflict among others prevailing in Ezeulu's family.

## 6. The Conflict within Ezeulu's Family

It would be important for us to have a global view in Ezeulu's family before going into the deep side of this conflict. In fact, Ezeulu is a polygamous man, with three wives namely Matefi who gave birth to three children : Obika a boy, Obiageli a girl, and Ojiugo a girl ; Ugoye gave birth to Uduche a boy and nwanfo a boy too and Okuata in her turn gave birth to three children namely Edogo a boy, Akueke a girl and Adeze a boy. Also, we learn that Matefi was Ezeulu's daughter and Amechi, Edogo's. Ezeulu also has a half brother called Okeke Onyeni a very important magician who has got the mastering of herb medicines. However, within Ezeulu's family, the relations between him and his children and wives reveal that Ezeulu has an unpleasant behaviour. In fact, Ezeulu is utterly contemptuous of the eldest Edogo, he treats him with great tactlessness, haughtiness, a complete absence of love. Actually Ezeulu has created dissensions, rivalries and jealousies among his children as he loves some children and treats others without affection.

As such, Edogo thinks that Ezeulu, their father loves Nwafo more than the other children. That is why he is preparing Nwafo to become chief priest, and has sent Oduche to the new religion so as to disqualify him for the succession of the chief priest, and thinks that their father should not bring or cause dissension among his children but avoid and prevent all that. In this respect, the conversation below is telling evidence :

*A man should hold his compound together, not plant dissension among his children. Whenever Edogo felt deeply he stammered agonizingly. He did so now i am listening Edogo told him that the reason why Ezeulu sent Oduche to the new religion was to leave the way clear for Nwafo to become chief preist. Who said so ? Asked Akuebue. (Arrow of God, p.126)*

We can understand that tension, rivalries and jealousies are intensified within Ezeulu's family since every child is conscious of the discrimination brought about by Ezeulu, their father. Here, some of Ezeulu's wives disdain

the others' children and there is also a lack of love among children themselves. In this connection, the following quotation is illustrative :

*Ojiugo was still sobbing when she reached home. Nwafo and Oduche had returned earlier (...) Matefi examined her daughter's face and saw what looked like the weal left by Oduche's five fingers. She immediately raised her voice in protest and lamentation so that all the neighbourhood might hear. (Arrow of God, p.128)*

The above quotation clearly reveals the atmosphere existing within Ezeulu's family, especially between Ezeulu's wives or between children themselves. In addition speaking of the matter of the chief priest succession, Edogo and Obika are not however interested in becoming chief priest and they think that Ulu is up to decide about it. In this respect, the passage below enlightens :

*But before Edogo could answer he added : you speak about Nwafo and Oduche, what about you and Obika ? Obika's mind is not on such things, neither mine. But Ulu does not ask if man's mind is on something or not. If he wants you he will get you. Even the one who has gone to the new religion, if Ulu wants him he will take him. (Arrow of God, p.126)*

When we refer to above passage we understand that, despite Ezeulu's choice related to the succession, Ulu is the only one suitable to choose, it may even be the one who is in the new religion namely Oduche or the one who is disdained by Ezeulu, Edogo. Then, we learn tha Ezeulu has sent Oduche to the new religion to be his eye there, but he is scornful of his intelligence. He is fond of Oboka, but when the latter is whipped by white man's wright, Ezeulu concludes even before he hears Obika's account, that the man must be guilty. In this regard, Edogo thinks during his detailed analysis of relations between their father and them that, the main source of the problem as being Ezeulu's refusal to accept his children are grown up. In this regard, Eustache Palmer (1979 : 94) writes :

*He must go on treating his grown children like little boys, and if they even said no there was a big quarrel. This was why the older his children grew the more he seemed to dislike them.*

It is just confirmed that Ezeulu is not in good terms with his sons mainly Edogo who felt to be the most illtreated by their father who loves more Nwafo the favourite for the priest hood succession. This is even the reason why Ezeulu's absence had given Edogo an opportunity to show his resentment against the old man's favourite. In this regard, this thought is backed up by the writer's wordings when he writes :

*Perhaps no one felt Ezeulu's absence as keenly as Nwafo. And now his mother was going too. But this second blow was greatly softened by the thought that Edogo was going well. Ezeulu's absence had given Edogo an opportunity to show his resentment against the old man's favourite. (Arrow of God, p.165)*

The above extract shows the atmosphere prevailing within Ezeulu's family during his stay in prison. In addition, a tension of coolness between Ezeulu and his brother Okeke, initiated about herb medicines by their father is also noticed. For Okeke, the coolness between them is about the power and heritage. In this connection, the following extract is eloquent :

*Okeke Onenyi always said that the cause of coolness between him and the present Ezeulu, his half brother, was the latter's resentment : at the splitting of powers between them. Further more Okeke adds that : he thinks that our father deliberately took it from him and gave to me. Has he heard me complaining that the priest hood went to him ? (Arrow of God, p.147)*

It appears that Okeke's knowledge of herbs makes Ezeulu to be scornful vis-à-vis his brother, and this is the reason why during Obika's marriage, Ezeulu had sent for a worthless medicine-man who could not even eat.

It can be concluded that, the succession for the position of the chief priest is the starting point of the conflict prevailing in Ezeulu's family. Actually Ezeulu has created dissensions, rivalries and jealousies among his children. He loves some children and treats others without affection. As such, Edogo thinks that Ezeulu, their father loves Nwafo more than the other children. It seems that, he is preparing Nwafo to become chief priest, and has sent Oduche to the new religion so as to disqualify him for his succession.

## Conclusion

To conclude, we can say that the exploration of Chinua Achebe's novel *Arrow of God* has helped understand how Achebe manages to represent the historical background of the Ibo people in his fiction. It sounds that, the Ibo village, within, is really as a cell of social conflicts and fundamental tensions, and we have also realized that Ezeulu, the chief priest of Ulu is at the centre of all, the various conflicts.

Apart from his conflict with the white man, it also results that some of Ezeulu's actions might look well like betrayal from the people's point of view. That is to say, Ezeulu fails to put himself into the position of the people who elected him as a guardian of the clan. He decides to tie friendships with the white man and send his son Oduche to join the white man's religion. Furthermore, the exploration of Achebe's *Arrow of God* also reveals that, con-

flicts have been caused by the white man's ambitions to impose his administration and establish the new religious system in Iboland and end with the Ibo traditional system. This policy has generated a great impact on the Ibo society.

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