



Dissertation

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**The Collapse of Igbo Traditional Society in Achebe's
Two Novels : Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God**

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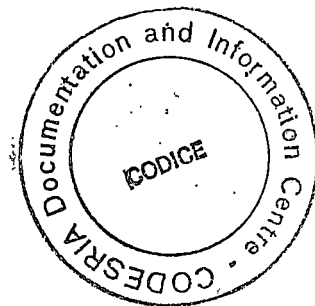
UNIVERSITE CHEIKH ANTA DIOP DE DAKAR
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THE COLLAPSE OF IGBO TRADITIONAL
SOCIETY IN ACHEBE'S TWO NOVELS:
THINGS FALL APART AND ARROW OF GOD

MEMOIRE DE MAITRISE

présenté par

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A C K N O W L E D G M E N T S

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To my family, my friends and all
the teachers around the world.

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I N T R O D U C T I O N

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In this essay our topic is about "the collapse of Igbo traditional society in Achebe's two novels : Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God."

We have chosen this theme because we think that it is necessary to pay a tribute to Igbo people's stifled authentic culture and therefore African culture since the Igbo do belong to Africa and still live in the Eastern part of Nigeria in West Africa (see map p. 14).

This issue is all the more important because we African are almost uprooted losing ipso facto our identity as negroes. If we happen to forget ourselves other nations can but forget us as far as humanity is concerned. We too belong to this world and ought to be regarded as human-beings. To convince the others to do so, cultural propaganda - but not cultural imperialism - is not unnecessary. Our intention is not different from that of Achebe as a teacher. We want to hit the nail on the head by making our eventual readers to understand Igbo mysteries, values and beliefs in preternatural occurrences as efficient powers capable of shaping human destiny willy-nilly. In brief our main purpose is to explain how do the Igbo happen to have such an attitude rather than another one. To put it in a nutshell we want to analyse in detail throughout this essay the mechanism which leads the Igbo to perceive themselves in this way rather than ^{an} the other, to interpret the events - - may it be natural or supernatural-as they do, to explain their lives and existence in the environment they live in as Africans. ^{the} Igbo's process of mind has given an opportunity to the white man to judge the black man and to condemn his supposed lack

of intelligence and upbringing. First African mind has been negatively explained by Claude Levi Strauss with his concepts of "primitive mind". It is high time. Europeans listened to the very natives' message, for, the black man has something different to tell and prove in the eyes of his disparagers. Achebe makes his duty to extol the African past and let us interpret it according to our own standpoint. He gives us facts and the very facts are polemical because pregnant with meaning for who dare go beyond the factual level and the forefathers' spiritual legacy.

Achebe invites us to dig into our past which has some dark stains however glorious it may be. By so doing, we will know what we can lose without great damage and what we may gain when in contact with the other. In front of that data, black men ought to understand how far not to go. This analysis of our forefathers' legacy may be used as an apology for black traditional culture or mere useless propaganda which does not tell on our everyday life when it is dealt with idealistically but not realistically. It must be more than a pious wish. Many African writers use literature as a means to prove everything, as a lumber-room. As for Achebe, it is an "applied art" to cure a worldspread disease diagnosed as a mental alienation as far as the black westernized man is concerned. Therefore we may ask: "does Achebe manage to avoid the easy temptation to idealize at will his pristine ancestral civilization?" Achebe himself gives us the answer. We will quote him in this issue later on. His opinion on African writers' role has been expressed many times in lectures, articles, essays and interviews. As far as

his views are concerned African writers do have a mission to carry out : to rehabilitate African dignity by telling the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth about African past as far as literary truth can be reached. We must require neither scientific nor historical truth because the writer may take liberties with history and he is not necessarily a scientist. However he can borrow his method of analysis which he applies to facts and **occurrences** may it be external or internal, natural or supernatural. The writer is somewhat a historian since he has indeed a story - for not to say a history - to tell : that of the individual, society or both under precise circumstances. He reacts here against those European ideologists who used to look at Africans as noble savages. Europeans look down on us because they think that we have invented nothing and are still swinging carelessly on our tropical creepers. This hackneyed and false image of the black man leads the white man to believe that he has the duty to civilize the grand child, I mean the black man.

This distorted view, this misconception of African traditional way of life compels Achebe to defend African past through the Igbo one. He pinpoints the traditional values of Igbo community without exaggerating either the good or the evil within his forefathers' land. Needless to say that the Igbo society is a microcosm of African one. Achebe's ambition is a lofty one. But how does he fulfill this gigantic task ? He uses all his talent to depict many aspects of Igboland customs and traditions in a given period. The Igbo clan belongs to West African cultural area. Achebe himself may be taken as an

impartial witness of that society of old. He has to tackle many or all the aspects of Igbo community to become more and more convincing in the eyes of the disparagers of African civilization which is even denied. The writer must underline his community's weakness and strength through its two characteristic heroes. I mean Okonkwo in Things Fall Apart and Ezeulu in Arrow of God. The two characters' failure tells **directly** on the collapse of ancestral wisdom and Igbo traditional society. What do we mean when we speak of the collapse of a society ?

The phenomenon of a collapsing society can be interpreted as the disruption of its ties which used to keep and check its balance over the abyss of nonentity. This does not mean that a society must be static and reject any metamorphosis. Metamorphoses are welcomed insofar as they do not strengthen the disruptive elements within society. Otherwise, the collapse is unavoidable. That is what befalls Igbo society we are going to deal with. Its agony is a long one because the chaos forces are loosed upon it. It is a fight to the death.

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
 The falcon cannot here the falconer
 Things fall apart ; the center (sic) cannot hold
 Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world. (1)

The phenomenon of the collapse is caused by disorder and turmoil. Was the society apt to survive after its clashes

1 - Cisse (Marième) - The Tragic Vein in Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God, Mémoire de Maitrise d'anglais 1987, quoting Yeats' poem entitled "The Second Coming", p. 9. : "The Tragic Vein in Achebe's Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God."

with the new order without metamorphoses ? That is the issue we intend to discuss throughout this essay.

What we admire in Achebe is his out-spoken-mind. In fact he does not wear blinders. His purpose is not to stamp out all the flaws of African society. He does not plead guilty for his forefathers' supposed inferiority but seems to tell us : "do not have guilt or inferiority complexes ; you match the white man if you are not better than him". Our defeat when facing the white man has a dialectical explanation in terms of human being's behaviour. To understand how Igbo society happens to be disrupted needless to say the writer too has to dig deep into his ancestral legacy to find out the quintessence of Igbo values in a hierarchical society in touch with an alien and hostile world which seems superior in many aspects as we will try to demonstrate through our analysis of Igbo traditional society collapse when clashing with the western values. Let us quote - as promised. Achebe's own definition of the writer's role to rehabilitate African ridiculed dignity. This may buttress his own standpoint - and mine too - on that matter in dispute among the highbrows.

The worst thing that can happen to any people is the loss of their dignity and self-respect. The writer's duty is to help them regain it by showing them in human terms what happened to them, what they lost. There is a saying in Ibo that a man who can't tell where the rain began to beat him cannot know where he dried his body. The writer can tell the people where the rain began to beat them. (1)

1 - G. D. KILLAM, African Writers On African Writing, Heinemann, London, p. 8.

Achebe's view about writers using African history is not a biased one. He does not exclude present days influences upon past values. He advocates the use of both valuable elements but he prefers to dig into the past which enables him to find back his lost roots and by the same way to find out black identity through ages. In his search he has found that the notion of solidarity was a valuable concept in African communal life. Since the colonizer has hindered all perspective to revive pristine custom of traditional society, the writer has indeed a paramount role to play nowadays. The writer is a sort of a Messiah. Achebe's thought process borrows historical and unquestionable facts to buttress his argumentation. He uses ironically some negative terms applied to Africa such as the "Continent of Darkness used - with its negative connotations - by some narrow-minded. European highbrows or ideologists of cultural imperialism such as Rudyard Kipling, le Comte Gobineau and George Allen.

Achebe may be accused of being "ethnocentrist" but what matters right now is not to disparage the white man or to blame Achebe but to look for convincing evidences against or for Achebe's statements about Igbo hierarchical values and structure. An analysis of social values and their impact on the individual is an imperative. It helps to highlight what is going on within the community and in the Igbo mind. A psychological approach to understand the characters is necessary if not compulsory. The conflict between the individual and society is not blatant yet. This is due to a certain standard or principle of behaviour gained through extra muros activities

and informal education which takes place everywhere and at any time.

In Igboland the individual has to give up a part of his freedom in exchange of his protection by his clansmen against natural and supernatural forces as far as it can be done. Any egotistic behaviour is doomed to fail. So the conflictual relationship between the individual and society is less acute than in western society. To provide against distorting his thought Achebe does not put up with mere assertion and theoretical arguments. He tries to buttress his arguments with the two novels we will analyse futhermore.

What I have said must not be understood to mean that I do not accept the present day as a proper subject for the novelist. (...). This, I think, is what Aimé Césaire means when he said the short cut to the future is via the past. (1)

Black Americans and some francophone intellectuals have differently expressed the way they understand their "blackness" or to speak like Senghor their "négritude or négrité". The English speaking writers speak of African personality. In his two novels Achebe attempts to prove that there is a balance of power in African traditional society despite some proclamation of faith to have a satisfecit from Europeans. Achebe does not try to please anyone. He tells things as they are. This leads him to refuse to praise every aspect of Igbo people's life. He gives us a realistic analysis of his past and dares to deal with mysterious and irrational forces which hamper his African

1. G. D. KILLAM, African Writers On African Writing, op. cit., p. 8.

clansmen from facing the danger which threatens them with more probable success than usual. The reasons why traditional African society failed are inherent in it. The author's intention is not to conceal that negative aspect. He is objective in his analysis. He happens to satirize some trite behaviour, some common beliefs and mental attitude. Achebe protests against the fact that many writers do romance in order to intoxicate their mind and that of their audience by exaggerating positively the ideal of their community. Therefore Achebe finds Camara Laye's Dark Child too romantic and idealistic. Achebe's realism and frankness urge him to extol the positive aspects and to thrash the negative ones. He even boasts of some European contributions to African development such as the advent of modern science and technique. This point is rather controversial since the white man's aim was not to develop Africa for itself but to take its wealth to Europe for the Westerners' own social welfare. This was possible because the natives suspect **nothing**; the cracks begin to wake them up. The reasons of the downfall must be looked for in Igboland traditional institutions which contain their own contradictions paving the way for the assault of Europeans. This tells on the quick triumph of the white man who is well aware of the weaknesses of that community.

Weakness and strength of Igbo social structure and its hierarchy can but tell on Igbo mentality shaped through ages by the collective conception of cosmic forces and man's position in the universe.

It is not easy to see clearly what we want to do without a plan. Thus we propose to follow this plan divided into three parts. Each one will have three chapters

PART I - Igbo social structure and values

PART II - An analysis of some characters' triumph or failure

PART III - Colonialism as the revealer of Igbo's weaknesses or strength.

We think that this plan suits our topic which can be summed up as follows :

- thesis
- antithesis
- and - synthesis

Which may consists in three main points : the causes the consequences and the **proposed solutions**. So we have a dialectical plan which fits a literary approach to restore Africans' pride and self-confidence by a **critical** study of Igboland decline. We will try to analyse as objectively as possible why African society - epitomized here by Igboland - will crumble down gradually and unrelentingly when facing foreign influences disparately and why the clashes of the two cultures were to happen. Achebe ~~teaches~~ us that the ruined culture is not necessarily the worst one ; but what happens is the obliged **dialectic** of things and history despite the writer's efforts to restore African dignity like many other writers but in a very original way of his own. Let us quote Achebe again to understand him better.

Today things have changed a lot, but it would be foolish to pretend that we have fully recovered from the traumatic effects of our first confrontation with Europe (...). Here then is an adequate revolution for me to espouse - to help my society regain belief in itself and put away the complexes of the years of denigration and self abasement. And it is essentially a question of education in the best sense of that word. (1)

The aim of education is to teach people how to face a new situation. ^{the} Igbo^s one does lack efficiency when confronting Western world. Achebe has not missed his target when he puts the stress on education. We dare affirm that the two novels we are dealing with are about African traditional education versus the Western one. The clash of the two will be bloody and thundering but how? That is the question we intend to analyse throughout the next pages of our essay.

1 - African Writers On African Writing, op. cit., p. 3.

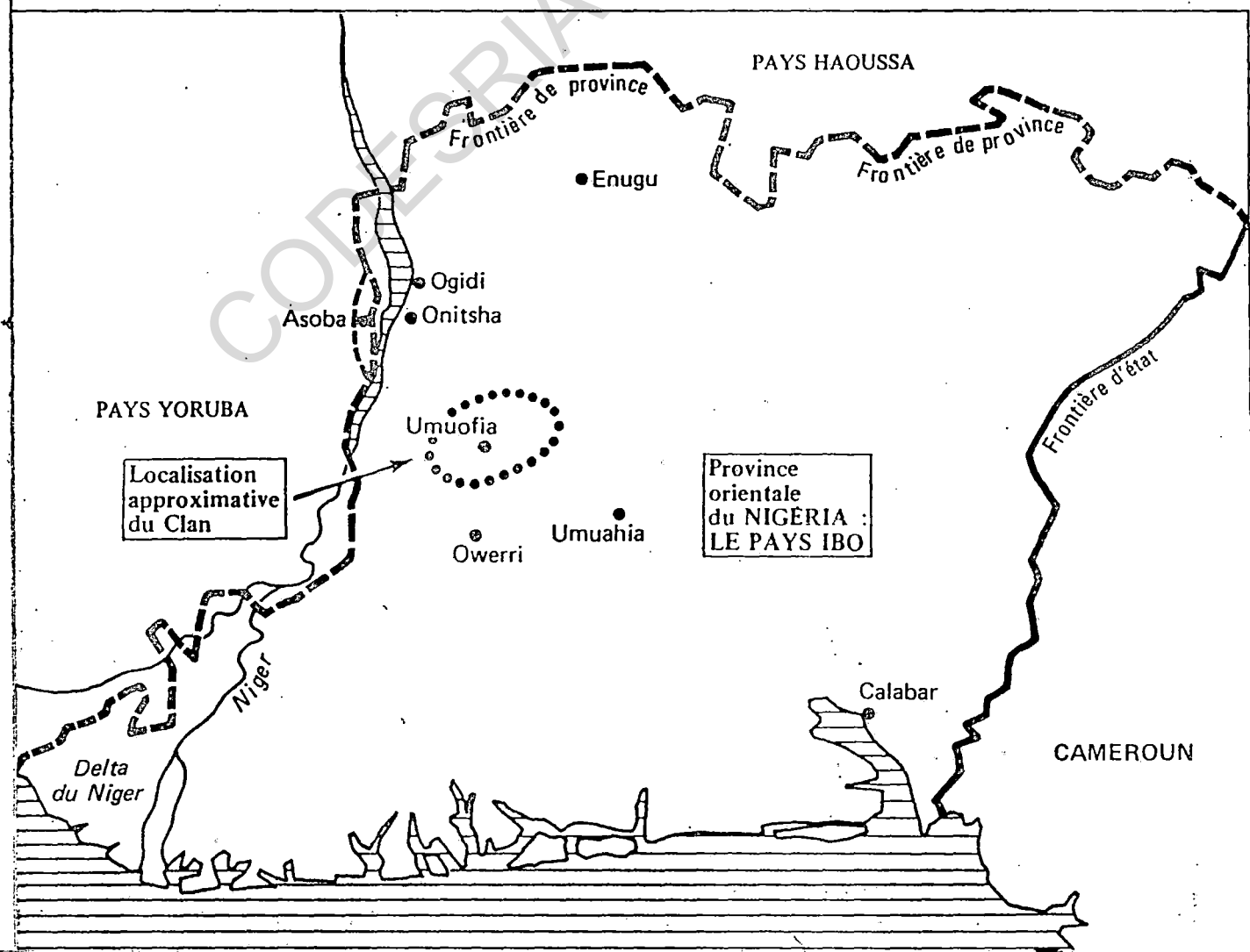
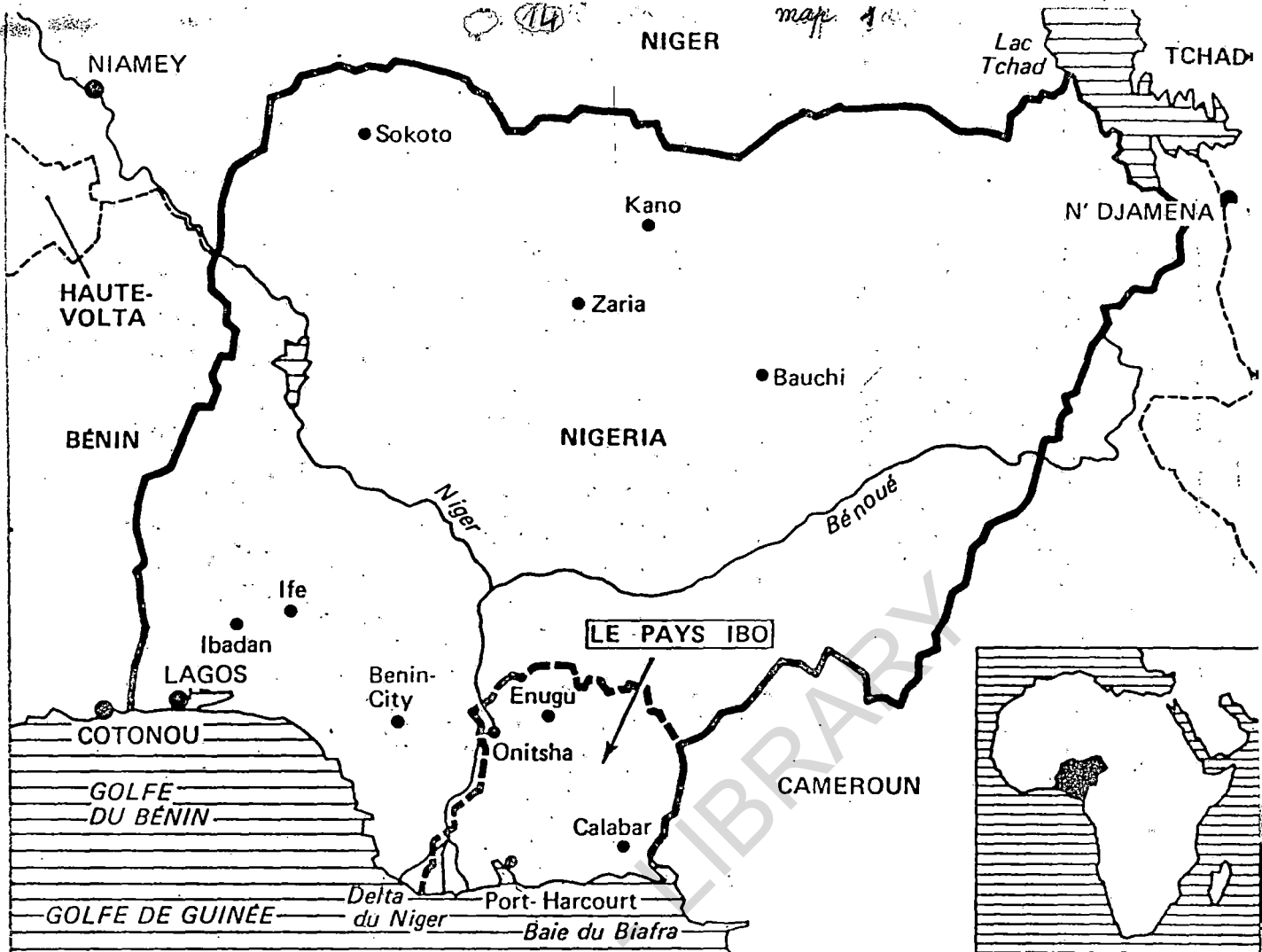
PART ONE



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CHAPTER I

THE IMPACT OF GEOGRAPHICAL ENVIRONMENT
ON IGBO TRADITIONAL VALUES



Nigeria is today the biggest African country which counts about eighty million people. It is inhabited by various peoples of different ethnic origins and cultures. The first important ethnic group is the Igbo who live in the eastern part of Nigeria (see map 1, p. 14). They constitute a relatively homogeneous group in West Africa. Many peoples speaking Igbo in this region : like Asaba, Agbor and Ogwashi-Ukwu, would be composed of some Igbo and some migrants from Benin or Igala.

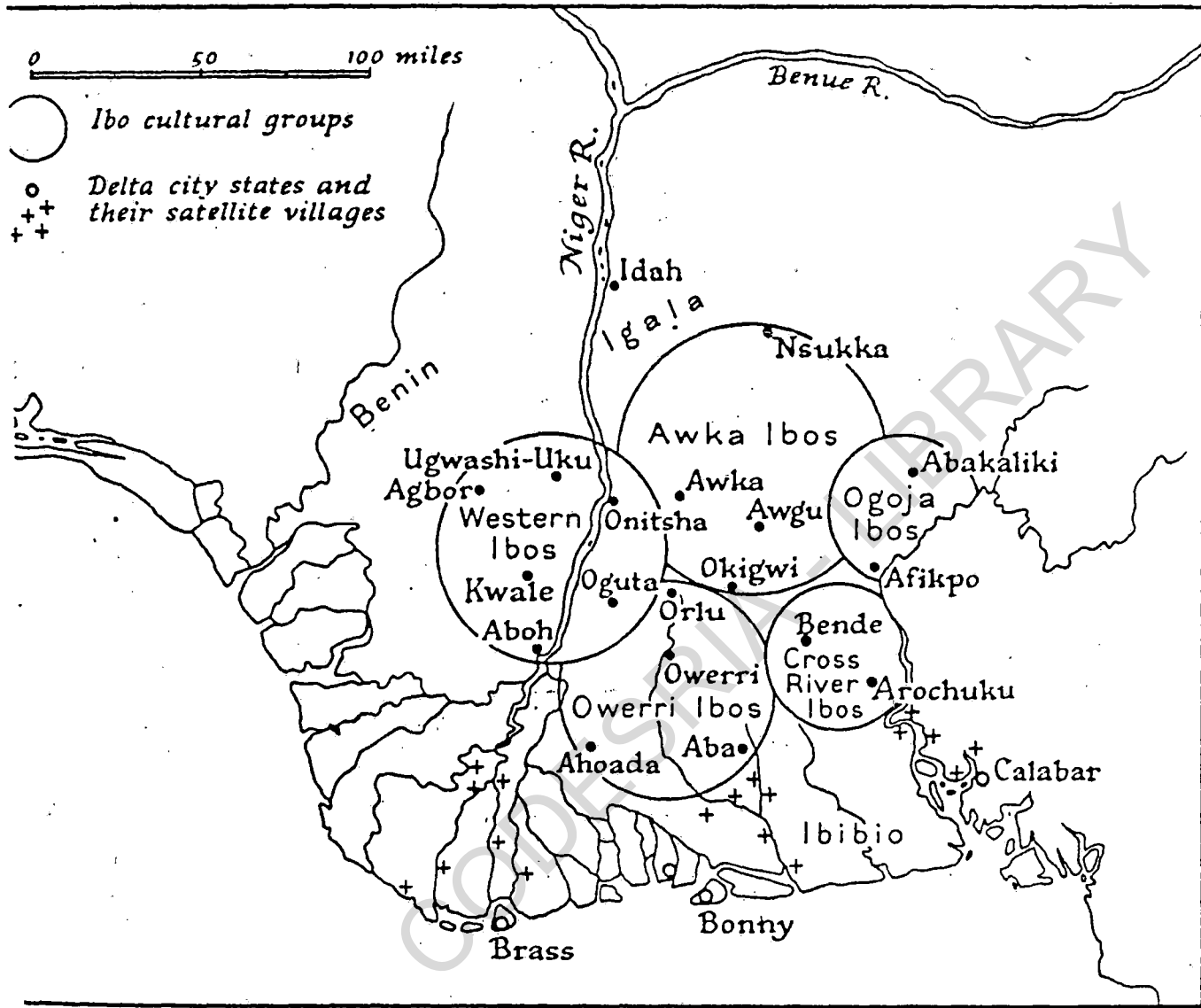
The Ibo people live in the area between Benin and Igala, the Cross River and Niger Delta city states. They were divided into five major cultural groups : the western or Riverain, northern or Awaka, Owerri, Cross River and Ogoja Ibo. Those cultural groups could be considered as "the tribes" of the Ibo nation since they did not possess a central government nor act together politically they were not "tribes" in the sense in which that word is used to describe for example the Egba or Ujebu "tribes" of the Yoruba people. (1)

The Igbo scattered over the land but share many things in common. They live in the same area, have most often the same ancestor and belong to the same cultural-area (see diagrams pp. 16-17¹⁹). One can rightly speak of the Igbo nation. Kinship or blood links buttress traditional society which was at that time well structured. There was a strong concentration of population compelled by coastal slave-trade and interclan wars to live in the forest far from alien contact and to keep their culture pure and unblemished. They lived in a rainy area where

1 - WELSTER (J. B.) and BOAHEN (A. A.) with IDOWU (I. O.), The Growth of African Civilisation, Longman, London 1967, p. 174.

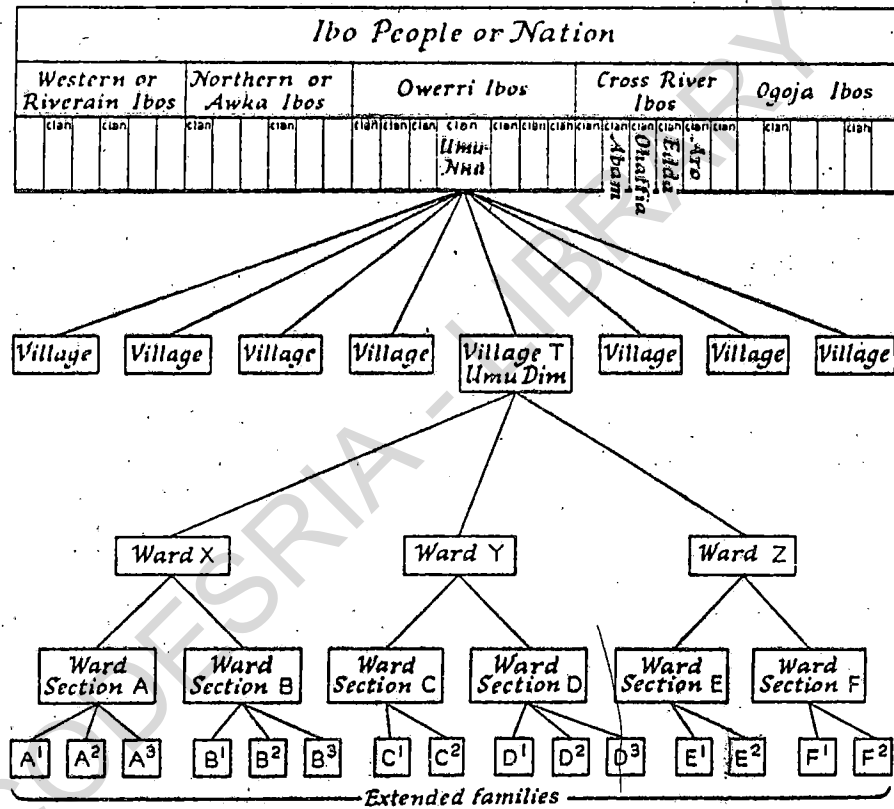
The Ibo and their neighbours (early nineteenth century)

Map 2



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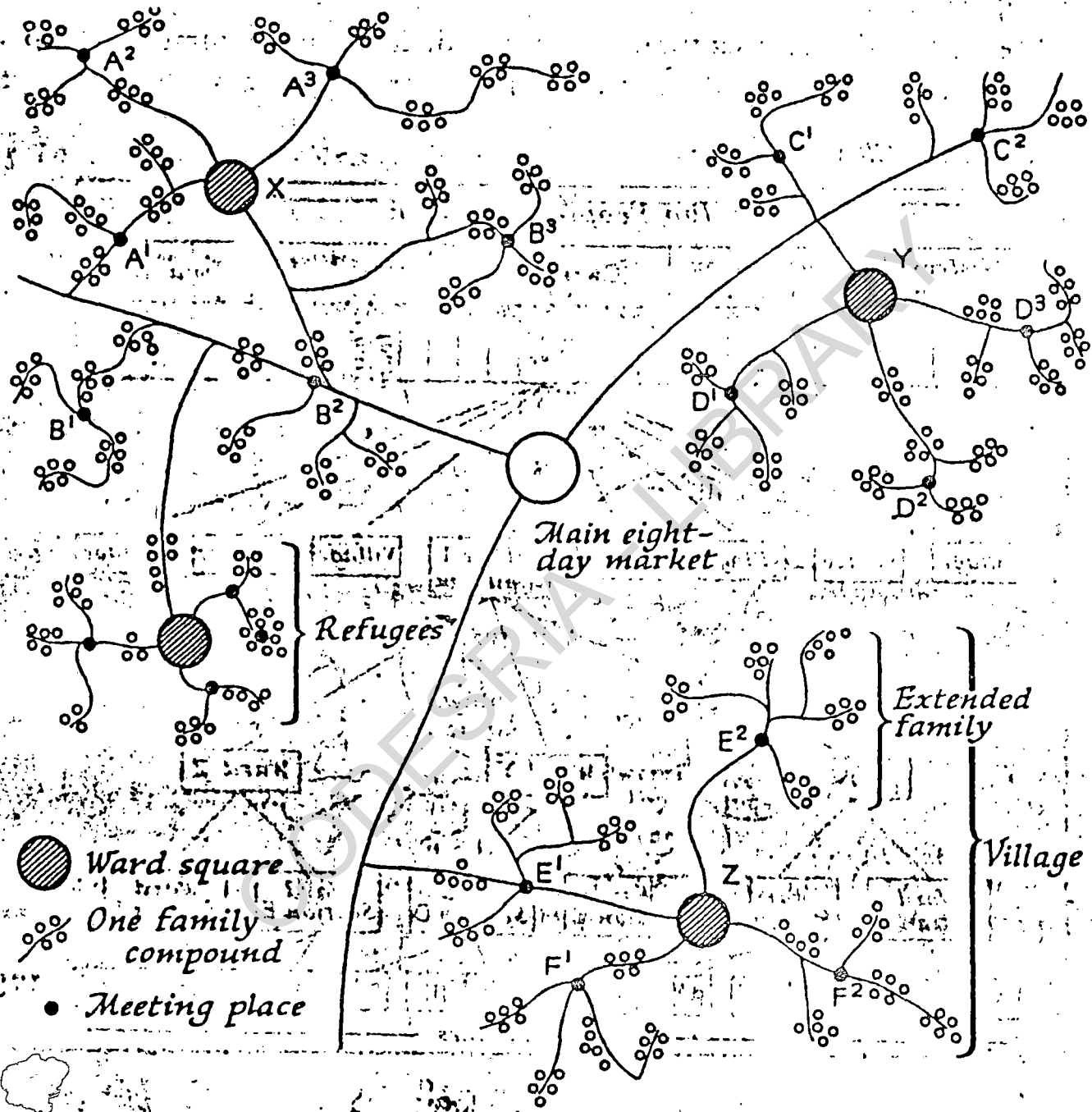
Ibo diagram 1: Clan organisation



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thick forest grew. An agrarian civilization developed there and affected Igbo every day life. The Igbo elaborated a complex system of values which reflect their agrarian mentality. The land was assimilated to a goddess because it feeds them from year to year. That metaphysical conception of the relationship between nature and man can but tell on an Igbo man's daily life.

Social institutions like religion, justice, administration are shaped according to Igbo worldview which is one of the most conservative. The individual's place in Igbo society is a crucial issue since he does not exist as such. He is defined by and within society. He belongs to a family which belongs to a clan. The clan lives in a sort of microstate called villages grouping the men of the same ancestor who is supposed to be the founder of the village. (see diagram 3, p. 21). Igbo villages' names are typical in that respect. They often begin with the radical "umu" which means in Igbo "children of..." for example Umuaro, Umuofia, Umunneora Umuachala and Umuachi. The villagers are supposed to descend from a common ancestor : (see "Igbo diagram 2" : "T.". A typical Igbo village p. 19). Therefore men within one clan are considered relatives scattered over thousands of villages. The village is the political entity of Igboland. A unique organized government does not exist over the clan or cultural group. But one may consider the way matters are settled among villagers as a sort of social institution or the government of an Igbo village and see how far it has been shaped by kinship-links or lineage within a large area (see Ibo diagram 3, p. 21).

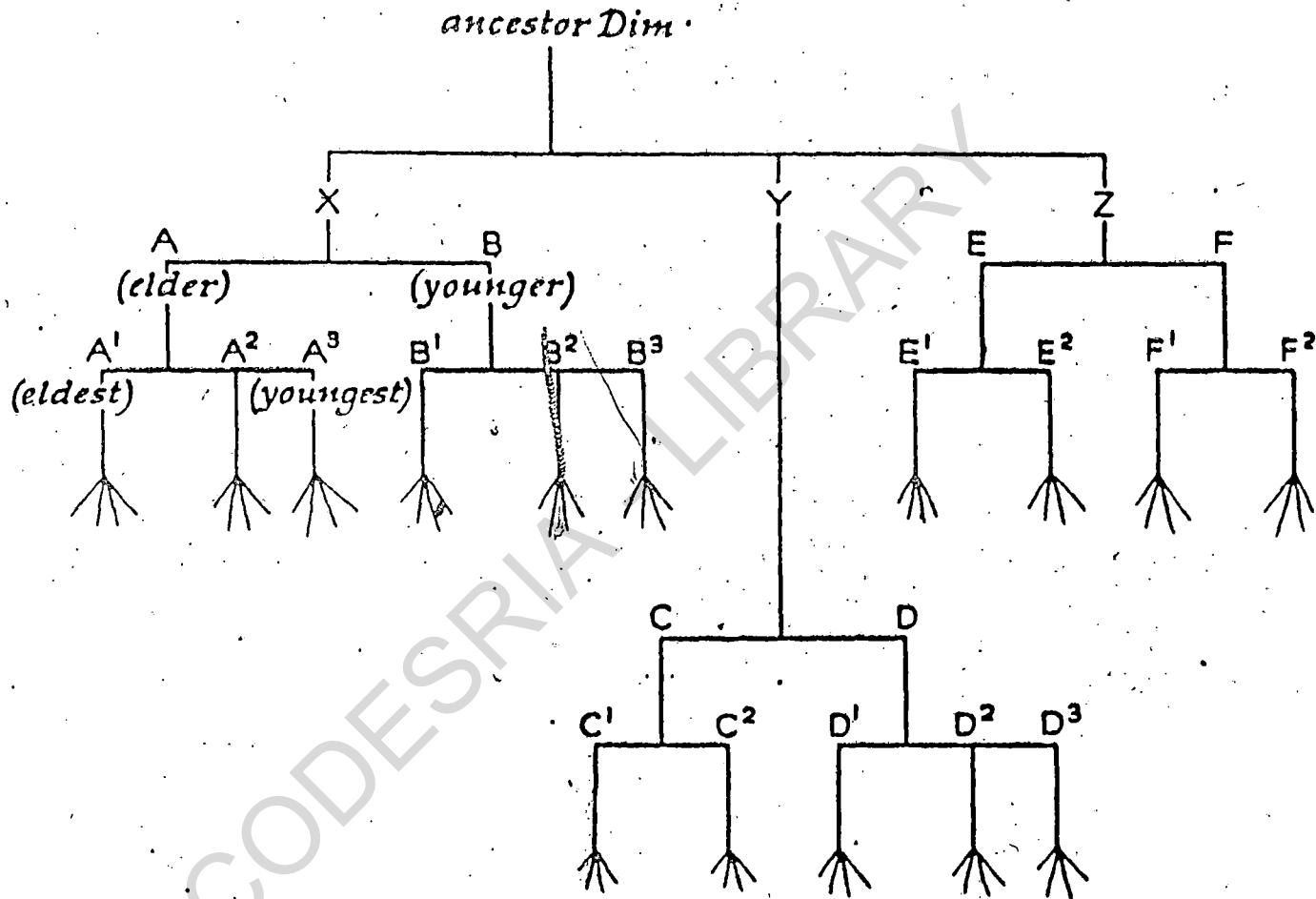


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All Igbo law and power stem from this geographical environment but how does it tell on his relationship with the invisible forces such as spirits, dead ancestors' wandering souls and on his perception of the chaos and the cosmos in their dialectical link, that is to say the relation between order and disorder, strength and weakness, society and the individual, death and birth, and finally good and evil ?

Igbo religious beliefs can help us to explain many things. First of all the Igbo are animists since they believe in the power of the lifeless things such as rivers, trees, stars or something else. This deep-seated animistic faith influences their daily activities. They live in a rural area and worship Ani, the goddess of the land because she is seen as a provider. Thus a sacred link exists between Ani and the Igbo in each hierarchy of social structure and even beyond. This spiritual tie establishes a bridge between the dead and the living. Dead ancestors supposed to be closer to the deities and each member of the clan who has a natural death is buried in the land and become powerful due to the land sacredness. On the contrary those who soil the land by their deeds or social status like twins or Osu must be thrown in Evil Forest because they stand for evil in order to cleanse the land and to appease Ani since she is the distributor of justice, wealth, health, good fortune and therefore happiness and social welfare. She may use the service of a priestess to carry out and interpret her will. Other gods exist but she is the busiest of all in Umuofia. Chuku the supreme god is rather distant like a father among his family. He minds only serious things. Ani stands

Ibo diagram 3 : lineage structure



Kinship relationships in village T : —

- Lineage = all who trace a relationship to ancestor Dim
- Major segment = " " " " " " " great-grandfather X
- Minor segment = " " " " " " " grandfather A
- Extended family = " " " " " " " father A¹

Ibo diagram 3: Kinship relationships in Ibo village 'T'. This and the two preceding diagrams should be discussed in class. How far can you find similar groups of relations among your own people?

for a mother letting her children suck her while Ulu looks like the puritanical angry God who punishes any transgression of ancestral or divine laws. Therefore religion shapes man's behaviour may it be visible or invisible. Faith plays a paramount role among the Igbo who are polytheists. The impact of their religion explains their outlook of the environment. Deities teach them what is to be done and what is not. There exist many common characteristics between African traditional religions. The Bambara's beliefs do not differ from those of the Igbo. A short comparative survey may be tempted. Here are some elements common to the two communities. Both believe in a supreme God with several subordinates. Amadou Hampâté Ba declares about Bambara's animism or traditional religion that :

Outre cette croyance en une Force Suprême transcendante, les religions traditionnelles ont encore en commun :

1. Le profond sentiment de l'unité de toutes choses. Pour elles, chaque partie se trouve dans le tout, baignant en lui, comme le tout se trouve dans chaque partie. Tout est lié. Tout est vivant. Tout est interdépendant. C'est pourquoi chaque action a une répercussion qui lui est propre dans l'ordre universel. D'où la responsabilité centrale de l'homme à l'égard de cet équilibre universel. (...)
2. La croyance en la nécessité de maintenir intacts et permanents des liens entre les vivants et les morts.
3. La foi en l'immortalité de l'âme. (...) (1)

1 - BA (Amadou Hampâté), Communication in "Colloque sur les religions traditionnelles africaines comme sources de valeurs de civilisation". Collect. culture et religion. Présence Africaine, Paris Ve, p. 66.

The fear to disrupt the cosmic order compels the Igbo to organize the earthly disorder by interpreting their deities' will in order to restore and to keep watch over the heaven by law. This brings about the need to live in community because the individual living by himself is inconceivable. In order to survive in a hostile environment the Igbo society has elaborated an original rural civilization in a certain extent. This search for equilibrium implies self-awareness and self-control so that they may influence negatively or positively human condition or human destiny. This explains the existence of medicine-men, priests "chi-" a personal god - and the "egwugwu" - "a masquerader who impersonates one of the ancestral spirits of the village". So Igbo village government functions as a political body when major decisions concerning the whole community are ^{to be} taken. There exist many levels for deciding on the individual's right and duties... Igbo social structure determines man's horizontal relationship with his fellows and his vertical relationship with deities. These two fundamental aspects of Igbo way of life are unavoidable if one wishes to understand Igbo institution be it political, administrative or even judicial. The divine is everywhere Igbo people are very religious. Their relationship with deities and ancestral spirits conditions their conception of law and customs, therefore man's place in the universe. Their wisdom makes up a coherent cosmology on which depends the role of man, family, clansmen, village and society. The main respected values are wealth, wisdom and manliness. The individual is judged according to his aptitude to secure those values.

In such a spiritual and nonetheless materialistic society a man was all the more important because he had many

full barns, numerous wives and children. In rural area available labour was valuable. The family is a hierarchical structure and its own values reflect sociocultural aesthetic and ethic. It is the microcosm while society is the macrocosm. The individual's beliefs and deeds are revealing of the social ethic. The worship of heroes, medicine-men, dead ancestors, priests and deities is a state of collective mind which tells on human being's everyday life. The Igbo man is aware of his place on and in the land. Dead or alive he knows where to go. His cultural legacy is very useful in that respect.

Cette conception (du monde), prise d'abord comme un système des éthiques prescriptives, relève du fait que les Ibo sont un peuple très religieux. Heureux de son appartenance à son Umunna, système de descendance par la ligne paternelle (il est en effet difficile d'imaginer un Ibo ignorant son Umunna) et jouissant de privilèges spéciaux dans un Umunne (ensemble des agnats de sa mère), un Ibo traditionnel a une conception dynamique du monde. Il l'explique en termes d'interrelation continue entre le matériel et le spirituel, le visible et l'invisible, le bon et le mauvais, le vivant et le mort. (1)

The earth is the provider and the protector. It is looked on as a tutelary goddess. The way an Igbo perceives his tie with the earth shapes his process of thought. He thinks of himself as a part of the universe sejourning on the land for a while. Like the seed which springs up from earth and will return to it, man knows where he comes from and where he is going, among ^{the} Igbo. He does not live in anguish except in extraordinary circumstances. An Igbo cannot imagine himself as an individual self isolated from the group. This is all the more true because a man alone is vulnerable before the chaotic world which threatens to reduce

.....

him to nonentity. To survive, the Igbo have built up a system of administration and a set of values which defines and determines human condition within the macrocosm or the superstructure that is to say society. 1. Igbo man can live nowhere else but within his traditional community which points out to him where he must stand up due to his contribution for the advancement and welfare of his fellowmen. The individual and society are dialectically linked. Igbo man is a well-balanced combination of social and natural laws.

L'isolement de l'individu est inconcevable.
Sa force vitale est en relation constante avec celle des ancêtres et des autres membres du groupe. La plus grande calamité consiste à en être retranché et réduit ainsi à une existence déficiente, sans protection, voué au néant. (1)

Therefore the individual fears to single out himself and becomes - by working hard - a hero that is to say someone admired because of his wonderful exploits, his highly beneficial deeds and his lofty principles. The hero epitomizes his society's values up to a point. He is daring and ambitious. He is rewarded in return by his clansmen who acknowledge his achievements.

Such characteristic features are visible on Okonkwo in Things Fall Apart. Okonkwo is physically strong. He is a good farmer a daring warrior and an unmatched wrestler. He can feed his family adequately, protect his community and honour his fatherland. Besides, physical strength is an external mark of manhood. But mere brutal force is not enough to impress ^{the} Igbo favourably. Intelligence is required too in many Igbo games

1 -- DESCHAMP (Hubert), Les Religions de l'Afrique Noire. 3ème édit. P.U.F., Paris 1965, p. 19.

which are a test of achievements. May it be spiritual or physical, an exploit is always an eloquent evidence of superiority. Okonkwo has proved to be skilful by throwing down his sly and strong opponent during a wrestling match between villages. From that day his success gradually increased among his clansmen.

Okonkwo was well known throughout the nine villages and even beyond. His fame rested on solid personal achievements. (...) That was many years ago, twenty years or more, and during this time Okonkwo's fame had grown like a bushfire in the harmattan. He has beaten the till now unbeaten Amalinze the Cat. Amalinze was the great wrestler who for seven years was unbeaten from Umuofia to Mbaino. (1)

Okonkwo's success is possible because the individual is rewarded according to his own merit and not to his father's. Okonkwo is a hard-working man. This enables him to belong to the high-ranking members of Umuofia community. He has inherited no wealth however rich he may be afterwards. His place depends on his capacity to meet his fellowmen's expectations. Each freeborn Igbo man may reach the highest summit of honour. Such a reward is not to be inherited. The hero's motivation is the fear of not being up to his ideal. He is an upstart with all it implies. Social ethic is a criterion to measure the individual degree of insertion in the community and his faithfulness to ancestral wisdom is rewarded. Those who rebel against such laws and customs are banished following Ani's decision. The goddess of the land rules Igbo community in Umuofia. She forbids to break the Week of the

1 - ACHEBE (Chinua), Things Fall Apart ; Heinemann, African Writers Series, London, 1986, p. 3.

Peace, to kill a clansman, to commit adultery or suicide and soil the land which is looked on as a supreme mother who cares about her children. Ceremonies are organized to thank Ani for abundant harvest while lazy men are taunted publicly. Unoka is belittled since his ideal is to take life as it comes; He rejects the social norm of behaviour as the gateway to happiness. He is an Epicurean. His flute enraptures him. He is a well known musician around villages. At his spare times Unoka lives in his ivory tower almost communicating with the invisible. For him, music has a therapeutic function. It keeps him alive when he experiences ~~aloneness~~ His golden tower - I mean the atmosphere in which he is fenced - prevents him from watching the hidden side of life. Life is something precious one must enjoy. When Unoka is thrown at the Evil Forest almost dying he brings his flute. His happiest moment is when he is playing music or while drunk. Villagers happen to call him to perform for egwugwu's ceremony.

He wore a haggard and mournful look except when he was drinking or playing on his flute. He was very good on his flute, and his happiest moments were the two or three moons after the harvest when the village musicians brought down their instruments, hung above the fire-place; Unoka would play with them, his face beaming with blessedness and peace. (...) They would go to such hosts for as long as three or four markets, making music and feasting. (1)

Unoka is one individual among many. He embodies what he thinks to be good. He chooses his own values and behaves accordingly. He is a day-dreamer who wanders over the land looking for merry-makings. Igbo society does not accept such **flightiness** of conduct.

Only a female, "an agbala", can do such thing in a society where manliness is rewarded accordingly. Unoka's behaviour when he was young foretells how he will behave when he becomes an adult. He used to look for birds instead of working at the country fields. We are not told anything about his parents. How do they breed him up ? That fact may highlight the inner motivation of the grown up because a man's education conditions his walk of thought and deeds which are the individual answer to the social demands and pressure. This answer may be adequate or not. Unoka's response to the social demand is rather inadequate so he is outcast. Agrarian society needs physical strength first. Unoka's outlook is a sort of a heresy since he merely takes the life by its brightest side. Now Igbo community condemns harshly the trespassing of its principles of ruling. Unoka the non-conformist must expect to be penalized by ancestral wisdom and divine laws.

He would remember his own childhood, how he had often wandered around looking for a kite sailing leisurely against the blue sky. As soon as he found one he would sing with his whole being, welcoming it, back from its long, long journey and asking it had brought home any lengths of cloths. (1)

The symbol of the flying birds has three connotations : happiness, laziness and freedom. Unoka dreams of more freedom so that he may lead a more joyous and cheerful life night and day without paying a high price for it. He wishes to have no commitment which will hamper his very way of life. Unoka's

1 - Things Fall Apart, op. cit., p. 4.

worldview is in contradiction with a society where the individual has a well-defined social function. Unoka wishes he were a bird which sings while people are working at the fields. The birds symbolize all that Unoka is hankering after. They sing, eat and fly. Unoka marvels at their freedom and carelessness. Unoka's feelings are child-like ones. He is too close to nature to be realistic. He is not up to feed his family. This attitude is a dishonour among ^{the} Igbo but he does not care. He has no sense of family duty. He is indignant to found a house. Unoka refuses to take into account what the Igbo systematically reject and disapprove. He is neither ambitious nor daring. He is diametrically opposed to his son. He has not at all the characteristic features of a hero. His community despises him because he is an "agbala" that is to say a man without a title, a female. *She* Igbo cannot understand a man who by his daily behaviour defies their customs and traditional wisdom. Therefore Unoka can but fail in the eyes of the Igbo.

That was years ago, when he was young. Unoka the grown up, was a failure. He was poor and his wife and his children had barely enough to eat. People laughed at him because he was a loafer, and they swore to lend him any more money because he never paid back. But Unoka was such a man that he always succeeded in borrowing more, and piling up his debts. (1)

Unoka in a certain extent prevents people from using the fruit of their labour. One man comes to see him because he wants to take the Idemili title which needs many expenses of cowries but Unoka welcomes him with a laugh before declaring that he cannot pay him back. The man is crestfallen and taken aback.

1 - Things Fall Apart, op. cit., p. 4.

He does not know which way to turn because he was not prepared to such a surprising attitude.

Achebe seizes this opportunity to describe to us Igbo etiquette. Society has prescribed a certain number of rules to respect between clansmen in particular circumstances like welcoming people, marriage, death or settling quarrel within the community. Each Ibo's act has a meaning. The beliefs shape the rituals which are the repetition of an act inspired by the forefathers or the clan-founder. The re-enactment of greetings symbolizes the peaceful will between the individuals. The greetings are good wishes which show the good will of a man towards his fellowman. The state of mind can be revealed by the answer to the greetings. Igbo community is a hospitable one as far as its ethic is not broken.

Ceremonies and rituals are useful in the sense that they are an informal school. They perpetuate the established order and maintain the group cohesion. The trespassing of the custom may be an offence to deities and ancestors and can be punished as such. The rituals of welcoming consists in drawing lines with a piece of chalk and breaking kolanuts. In Igbo community kolanuts are much praised. They are a sign of hospitality and agreement between men. They show that one is favourably disposed towards someone. It is an offence to refuse to share kolanuts with one's guest. Talking always begins by crunching kolanuts. Igbo society is respectful of the etiquette. Unoka is aware of it and sticks to it since it does not cost him too much. The community foresees everything to check and keep in balance the social customs. From birth to death man knows

what to do in a given circumstance. Each society has its characteristic features. ^{the} Igbos do have high principles which ennoble the individual and directly society.

I have kola "he announced when he sat down, and passed the **disc** over to his guest.

"Thank you. He who brings kola nuts bring life. But I think you ought to break it." replied

Okoye passing back the **disc**.

"No, it is for you, I think" and they argued like this for a few moments before Unoka accepted the honour of breaking the kola. okoye meanwhile, took the lump of chalk, draw some lines on the floor and painted his big toe. As he broke the kola, Unoka prayed to their ancestors for life and health, and for protection against their enemies. (1)

After crunching kolanuts together and talking about Umuofia daily life Okoye tells Unoka why he has come. Unoka, unfortunately cannot refund his debts. Okoye is disappointed because he needs the money to organize a famous ceremony, for he is ready to take the Idemili title. But Unoka does not care. The two men are artists but they have different worldview. Achebe makes a contrasting study of the two musicians. Okoye too plays music but he is very realistic and lives harmoniously in his society. Art is not a means to divide people. An artist is not necessarily someone who must live in his ivory tower, someone who is a sort of a pariah like Unoka.

Okoye does care about material wealth. He also understands that life is a balance between the body and the spirit. He has a better grasp of life as a whole than Unoka. Realistic artists do exist mostly in Igboland where **art** is functional. People do not make art for **art's sake**. Art must be socially useful. It is not an ivory tower to fence oneself in.

1. Things Fall Apart, op. cit., p. 4.

Okoye was also a musician. He played on the Ogene. But he was not a failure like Unoka. He had a large barn full of yams and he had three wives. And he was going to take the Idemili title, the third highest in the land. It was a very expensive ceremony and he was gathering all his resources together. That was in fact the reason why he had come to see Unoka. (1)

After long wanderings away Okoye at last asks Unoka to give him back the money he lent him two years before. The fellow answers that he cannot pay him back yet now. He will do so after the big debts. Upset by such an unselfconsciousness Okoye leaves him alone with no much ado. Unoka's attitude is ironic and offhand. It is not honourable to break one's words. Society obeys certain principles such as honesty and gratefulness. The fittest individual to survive is he who sticks to the community life ethic. Society shapes the individuals who according to their acceptance or rejection of the traditions are accepted as noteworthy members of the clansmen or as outcasts. Failure or success depends on the individual behaviour within Igboland. The social structure or the superstructure conditions the individual deeds. The hero or the anti-hero is characterized by his readiness or not to be **submissive** to the social order and law. The main characters stand for their social values. If they rebel against society they fail. Sometimes the hero faces two **contradictory** worlds on the point to disappear and another which is to come. This period of transition is fatal. No hero can be flexible before such events **without** destroying his inner self which is characteristic to him and makes look on him as the most attractive character in a novel, particularly in Achebe's two novels.

1 - Things Fall Apart, op. cit., p. 5.

Unoka fails because he does not take into account the demands of his clansmen mouldered by their worship of Ani while Okonkwo's success is widening as long as he does strictly what is allowed and avoids what is forbidden by society.

Igbo social structure is organized so that it can grant success or failure according to the individual's behaviour within that very social structure.

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A short analysis of social structure will be informative to better understand how mankind has evolved. Our purpose is to pinpoint some common characteristic features of human societies which condition people's triumph or failure when facing a hostile environment. Like many other social organizations African social structure has been shaped by struggles against its own contradictions. In the process of this long and hopeful fight man becomes aware that an isolated individual cannot overcome the hostile environment which threatens to crush him down. This makes him think about his common cultural identification. Therefore human beings get historical consciousness of belonging to a spiritual legacy. So men do feel the need to gather to put their forces and intelligence together to improve their status.

Before this hostile environment they organize themselves in families, tribes, clans and villages to resist any threat. By trial and error their community becomes more and more structured taking into account people's deep-seated aspirations to peace, safety and quietness. They conform their lives to their worldview modelled by their religious faith. A comparative study of African traditional societies will prove that there does exist a cultural African unity despite some light difference. These elements of common destiny and culture are visible in some cultural manifestations here and there. Senegalese wisdom and the Nigerian one have many resemblances. Igbo sayings and Wolof ones denote the same worldview. Friendship and solidarity within a community, totems and "taboos" are characteristic features of the two communities. Achebe's proverbs are revealing in that respect. Many Igbo proverbs do have their

counterparts in Wolof society. Here are some Igbo's and wolof's proverbs as counterparts :

The fly that has no one to advise him follows the corpse into the ground... (1)

In Wolof

Kalél bu amul nijaay ci mbédd mi ley déggé. (2)

It would be interesting to make an exhaustive analysis of their respective culture but such is not our purpose here. Therefore we will deal with Igbo social structure.

Igbo social structure is a well-woven one. It conditions the individual daily life and even beyond. The individual too conditions it because social structure for an Igbo is not a mere superstructure. It is functional insofar as it plays an important role for the group's survival and progress since among these people nothing is given once for all. Things must evolve to a certain extent. Some improvements are welcome and accepted as such as far as they do not disturb Igbo life as a whole or breach ancestral law and custom. If social Igbo structure was too rigid the very notion of hero in Achebe's two novels would be questioned because the hero is by essence someone who carries out exploits. His life is not trivial. His deeds are in accordance with his status and social ethic. This ethic must not hurt the readers' moral feeling or that of the hero's fellowmen. The morality ought to be sound. It obeys a certain logic commonly admitted among ^{the} Igbo and sensitive men. Social ethic is based upon good and evil even if they are not absolute. Subjectivity may prevail in that field.

1 - ACHEBE (Chinua), Arrow of God, second edition, Heineman, London, Ibadan Nairobi, p. 226.

2 - Celui qui n'a pas de conseiller risque de souffrir littéralement "l'enfant qui n'a pas d'oncle sera éduqué par la rue". N.B. l'explication n'est pas restrictive.

Some critics speak of the anti-hero who is a fictional character - as the hero is - who dares to challenge his society as a whole because in a given moment there is not a possible ground of understanding between him and his community. Therefore he does not hesitate to rebel and to bully his likes. As far as the heroes are concerned I would rather speak of positive heroes at their beginning and negative heroes when internal clashes start.

The positive hero is or would be someone who achieves deeds to better his social structure and the negative one, he who annihilates any perspective of progress. He is a sort of an anarchist or a non-conformist ; Okonkwo and Ezeulu will be first positive, second negative and this respectively, precipitating their moral or physical killing since they have no longer a role in the wheels of the Igbo social structure. The positive hero compared to the negative one is rather a reformer, a revolutionary because he is a visionary indeed, unless he is a conservative man like Okonkwo and Ezeulu in a given time of their lives. However Okonkwo is more conservative than Ezeulu. Both are determined by the superstructure they have already found in place. Their aptitude to improve it or not defines their status at the level of the Igbo social structure.

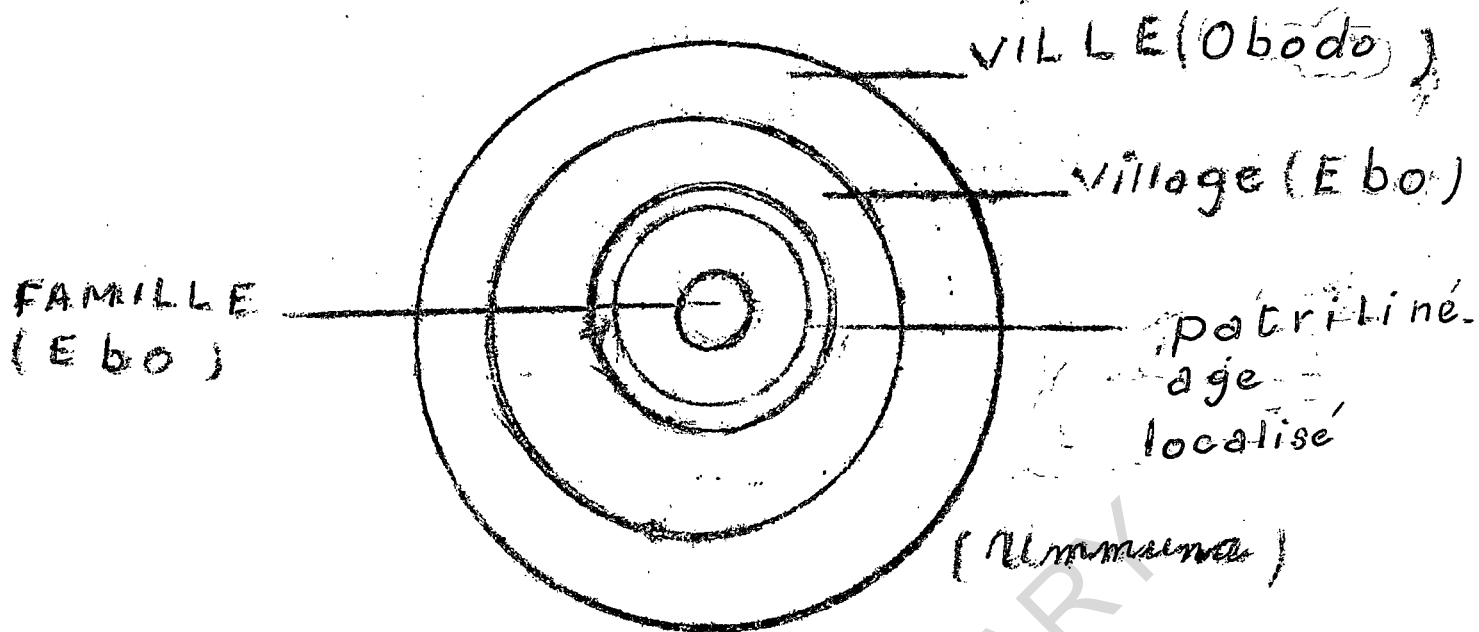
The Igbo social structure is the boundary of human freedom. It enables man to know what is to be done and what is not after a long time of initiation and observance gradually carried out by the group educators who are the keepers of the established order which has two dimensions as far the superstructure and the infrastructure are concerned since men are

alike everywhere. They have always tried to turn out chaos into cosmos. At least they share their humanhood since Adam and Eve. Here is a sensible explanation to help to understand the Igbo universe.

(...) il faut remonter au geste primordial et l'insérer dans le développement de cette société de type agraire que l'on retrouve chez les Ibos aussi bien d'Umuofia que d'Umuaro, avec toutes les pratiques culturelles et cultuelles et cette conception du monde, ce sens de l'organisation et de la hiérarchisation de l'univers que l'on retrouve chez toutes les populations agraires de type archaïque, de tous les pays et de tous les temps. (1)

Igbo social structure does not completely differ from that of other African societies except that they know no king. They organize the way they want to be ruled in accordance with their metaphysical principles based upon their conception of deities' relationship with men. Igbo society is prompt to reward individual merits or punish any breaching of law and custom according to their forefathers' decrees. No man is above his clansmen however powerful he may be. Igbo social structure is conceived in such a way that individual success or failure may reflect man's responsibility which seems to contradict the existence of the chi or personal god supposed to be responsible for an Igbo man's lot. Achebe has not given a decisive answer to the issue of man's freedom and the notion predestination. The Igbo man seems to be a centre of conflicting interests whose equilibrium helps him to survive harmoniously within the community-life consisting of a village or village-group which is represented as follows by Sunday in his Sociologie du roman africain.

1 - MELONE (Thomas), Chinua Achebe et la tragédie de l'histoire, Présence Africaine, p. 200.



Igbo men perceive natural elements by couples, males and females. The sky is male and the earth female. All that exists on earth is their sons and daughters.

Human beings imitate the structure of the universe they live in whenever it meets their demands. The explanation of Igbo social structure dates back from the cosmic organization. Igbo social structure in its attempt to restructure its environment do acknowledge the existence of two antagonistic forces, good and evil, male and female, chaos and cosmos. Evil Forest epitomizes this last dualistic view of the universe. This outlook explains why the living and dead are so closely linked. The Igbo do not make a dichotomy between matter and spirit. They confuse them since they are so imbricated that nobody can tell them apart at first sight except initiated men such as priests. Most people

(diagram 4) cf. Sunday (O. Anozie), Sociologie du roman africain, Collection Tiers Monde et Développement, Edit. Aubier Montaigne 13, Quai de Tonte, Paris VIe, p. 92.

hold that faith in the spirits from hear-say according common beliefs transmitted from mouth to ear like in many African oral tradition countries.

In Igbo traditional society the individual is not alone as far as he conforms his behaviour to social norm . The society ~~guarantees~~ him protection and safety against potential threat as long as this can be done according to social means and possibility. Social ethic determines social structure but a mutual influence exists because they form a dialectical entity as the individual and society do. Achebe's Igbo community ignores Rousseau's theory of "the good savage" living in Nature which meets all his requirements. The individual's place is defined in and by the community because it is a condition of the demands of Igbo etiquettes which people must stick ^{to} to live in harmony within Igbo community.

Entendons par là que l'infrastructure socio-politique Ibo montre une nette tendance républicaine ouverte à toute libération de la personnalité sociale dans le cadre du respect et de la compréhension réciproques entre l'individu et le groupe. (1)

In Igbo social structure the individual is not an abstract creature. He is a man who has all his prerogative as long as he obeys the decision democratically taken. Now the hero must be original and single himself out to lord it over the overwhelming majority of common men but first belongs to a family which itself belongs to a clan or tribe.

1 - Sociologie du roman africain, op. cit., p. 91.

41

The family is the smallest coherent entity in Igbo social structure. It can be roughly divided into two parts : the ummuna and the ummune. The ummuna is an Igbo word which means the children of the same father and the ummune those of the same mother. The basic social structure is composed of a father and a mother or mothers in a polygamous man's house. The husband and his wife are the first responsible elements for the household as far as children are concerned. The father's role is paramount in the family affairs because Igbo family is patrilineal. Man is the head of the family and is held responsible for what happens in his compound. The wives must come from different neighbouring villages. In that sense the exogamy principle strengthens the kinship ties, to avoid a sort of an incest. ^{the} Igbo are touchy about sexuality . a man must customarily marry outside his own village because those who live in the same village are supposed to have a common ancestor who is the village-founder. The marriage outside the village is likely to prevent a next conflict among clansmen. The ties of blood are not easy to undo and Ani punishes the breach of kinship relation. The ummuna and the ummune are linked by emotional ties. Those considerations make an Igbo man be aware of the notions of solidarity and unity. The family structure is a democratic and an egalitarian one. The assembly of family headed by the oldest male member settles any conflict and rivalry within the house. If the dissensions are too acute to be settled within social or family structure one member may leave and founds another village to avoid bloodshed. Igbo families genealogy tree always happens to agree on a mythical ancestor founder of the clan and therefore of the village.

Igbo spirit of independence urges them to found many villages scattered throughout Nigerian tropical forest in a rather rainy area. The Igbo villages' main characteristic features are their fragmentation and lack of a centralized political and administrative power. This may be perceived by a non-experienced man as an element of disunity but things are more complex.

The forces of fusion triumph over those of fission. Kinship unites ^{the} Ibo who make up small and more or less independent social entities. Many of these entities can constitute a group of villages or village-group according to their affinities. This gathering of villages does not prevent each of them ~~from having~~ ^{an} autonomy to manage its own affairs in accordance with its interest. Sometimes a village-group interferes to settle one village affairs even by compulsory measures. The village is characterized by the fact that its inhabitants have

common territory, speak common language despite some dialectical variations. (1)

The "dialectical variations" must not hamper their understanding each other. The village structure enables ^{the} Ibo to lead a life culturally homogenous. Since there is no central authority how to check the balance between possible clashes of interests which can be regarded as disruptive factors within the village-group? A village is not only a mere gathering of people it must also be an ideological entity. This calls in mind the issue of social relationship within Igbo community.

1 - GREEN (M. M.), Igbo Village Affairs, second edition. Frank and Co. Ltd, Great Britain 1964, p. 5.

the
How far do /Igbos consider themselves to be one people ?

To solve the problem of relationship/^{the}Igbos practice
the exogamous marriage, that is to say an intermarriage.

By the rules of exogamy girls leave the village at marriage and before that pay frequent visits to the husband's home. They do not, therefore, have a separate house in their own village. (1)

The village-group favours marriages between girls and young men from neighbouring villages because of their positive consequences. By so doing the different villages are bound to co-operate rather than to quarrel. The emotional and blood ties are very strong among/^{the}Igbos. The possibility of inter-clan wars is reduced and the notion of a dualistic belonging may help to appease some warlike mood.

The village seen as a political unit functions like one body. Decisions are easier to check for that reason. The ideological and emotional ties help to maintain social stability and peaceable atmosphere among the villagers. For that purpose two factors are to be taken into account. How does the village-group function and who must take the most important decisions ?

To understand how does the community work we have to examine *Igbo* social structure. Igbo society is one of the most democratic and egalitarian. The decisions according to their importance and impact on the community life may be taken at two levels. Whenever the village or the group-village must make up its mind, a town *crier* calls a meeting

1 - Igbo Village Affairs, op. cit., p. 18.

which may concern respectively the assembly of the elders and that of the villagers or all citizens. If human beings cannot find out a solution to the problems submitted to the two assemblies, the priest consult the Oracle and every one ought to conform to its decision and law. The hierarchical social structure is in accordance with the divine order.

Human and supernatural organisation follow closely similar lines and the supernatural help to validate and support the human. (1)

We will examine the role of each assembly and its prerogative in Igbo society. First of all the assembly of the elders as its name indicates is the gathering of the most venerable older men who must settle quarrels and conflicts between families, individuals or clans. They can speak as masked spirits or egwugwu before the other villagers to judge special cases. Their power is not limitless. A man who has recorded services for the clan may belong to this wise assembly. The elders' assembly decisions are seldom questioned. They are the representatives of the ancestors' spirit and deal with everything affecting the community life as a whole.

The elders, or ndichie, met to hear a report of Okonkwo's mission. At the end they decided, as everybody knew they would, that the girl should go to Obuefi Udo to replace his murdered wife. (2)

The village has many means to counteract the elders' decision when it is unpopular because arbitrarily taken. Igbo historical background gives an evidence of that assessment and

1 - Igbo Village Affairs, op. cit., p. 26.

2 - Things Fall Apart, op. cit., p. 9.

reveals a well-balanced society.

At the assembly the elders laid the issues before the people. Every man had a right to speak, the people applauding popular proposals and shouting down unpopular ones. Decisions had to be unanimous and it was here that young or wealthy men with records of service and dedication to the village could influence policy. If the elders try to enforce an unpopular decision the young men could prevent any decision through the operation of the unanimity rule. If the Amala-ala (assembly of elders) acted arbitrarily and refused to call the assembly the people could demand it by completely ignoring them and bringing town life to a halt. (1)

The assembly of the villagers is convened when a decision calls the attention of the all free-born men. In wartime or when an abomination is committed it happens to take decision in state of emergency. The whole community must be present. All the villagers have to make up their minds at once without dithering. Both assemblies are expected to maintain the ancestral wisdom alive and therefore the clansmen within the Igbo village-group. The dead ancestors' spirit meddle with human earthly justice since the egwugwu too intervene to settle some typical cases or to punish any law-break.

(...) the ancestors of the clan who had been committed to Mother Earth at their death emerged again as egwugwu through tiny ant-holes. 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 uninitiated. (2)

1 - WEBSTER (J. B.), BOAHEN (A. A.) and IDOWU (H. O.), The Growth of African Civilisation, Longman, p. 175.

2 - Things Fall Apart, op. cit., p. 131.

Among other roles, the egwugwu administrate justice. They settle domestic quarrels and avenge offended ancestors. They constitute nine masked spirits coming from the nine Umuofia villages. Here is a case of a man who is given to beat his wife till she miscarried. His name is Uzowulu. He has done so many times. One day she flees away from her husband's compound who complains and takes her before the "egwugwu". The chief egwugwu rises up and judges the case without any partiality. After hearing the two sides that is to say Uzowulu and Odukwe, the wife's brother the nine egwugwu consult together and take a wise decision. The head of the "egwugwu" puts the blame on Uzowulu. He speaks to him in ironic terms.

Go to your in laws with a pot of wine and beg your wife to return to you. It is not bravery when a man fights with a woman. (1)

Uzowulu's case may be judged by the elders' assembly but since he is a head-strong man, to frighten him to accept wisely the decree of the egwugwu, Evil forest, one of them compells him to agree on what have been decided commonly. A man from Umuofia wonders if that precise case merits to be brought before the egwugwu.

I don't know why such a trifle should be brought before the egwugwu, said one elder to another.

- Don't you know what kind of man Uzowulu is. He will not listen to any other decision, replied the other.

As they spoke two other groups of people had replaced the first before the egwugwu, and a great land case began. (2)

1 - Things Fall Apart, op. cit., p. 60.

2 - Ibidem.

In Igbo society the individual is thus compelled to obey the law of the community. Social pressure is efficient to regulate daily life. Evil Forest's words have a psychological effect on Uzowulu who is inclined to rebel against law and custom. Evil Forest goes on his own way to frighten Uzowulu.

I am Evil Forest. I kill a man on the day that his life is sweetest to him. That is true,
replied Uzowulu. (1)

Unable to do something else Uzowulu accepts the judgement. The egwugwu counterbalance any further attempt to disrupt the clan-cohesion.

Another group is important to analyze. It is the age-group or the young men of the village or village-group who have been initiated at the same time. The age-group defends the interest of its members. In Igbo social structure people have an accurate sense of justice. No one can understand better than themselves the preoccupation of the youth. So they are given an autonomous power to settle their matters among themselves without breaking the fundamental notions of unity and cohesion. The elders need the youth because of their physical force and the youth the elders due to their wisdom. The last ones warn and advise them. They initiate them to the custom and law of the clan. The age-group is the threshold of manhood and manliness. It is a test-period before definite social insertion consancted by marriage and co-operation with the other clansmen.

Rivalries are frequent between different age-groups. Each of them wants to give an evidence of its maturity in

competition with the previous ones. Sometimes their interests clash and elders must intervene to restore peace and mutual understanding and respect. The age-group defends the interests of its members but a ground of understanding is always possible with the other community members.

It is in this bond of common interest rather than in any specific activity that the significance of the age-group would appear to consist. (1)

All those social sub-groups such as the assemblies of elders and villagers, the egwugwu and the age-group make it possible for the Igbo to have a common destiny and to live in a viable society. The collective works may be an illustration of that aspect of solidarity. During a certain period Igbo group-village gather to plough the paths which lead to the central market. This is an occasion for them to show their achievements and characteristic features as far as emulation is concerned. A typical Igbo man cannot refuse to participate to the collective works without being looked on with mistrust and even disapproval. For Igbo community a man is first of all a social being. He belongs to his umune and his umuna but this last one is paramount since Igbo social structure is patrilineal. However all within one clan are considered relatives due to the emotional ties.

Among these people trade is secondly to agriculture as a means of livelihood and is one of their ruling passions. Market are the chief events of the week and arrangements largely revolve round them. All the villages of Agbaja have paths leading to the central market place and once a year on the same day, the villages clear their paths. This simultaneous act, performed at the season of the annual religious rites of the whole group is felt to be a symbol of Agbaja unity. (2)

1 - Igbo Village Affairs, op. cit., p. 25.
2 - Igbo Village Affairs, op. cit., p. 12.

The performing of those annual rituals within the clansmen reminds the people of their common origin and helps to maintain their unity and group awareness. The feeling to belong to a well-defined social structure which has its totems and taboos can but condition the individual's success or failure according to his aptitude to stick to the social principle of behaviour or not. From birth to death and even beyond a man's everyday life is checked. The justice *administration*, the assemblies of elders or villagers, the nine egwugwu are the symbol or the reflection of the supernatural beliefs upon human condition. Everyman's deeds must be in accordance with the "Mother Earth" that is to say Ani. He who rebels against it is doomed to fail, he who sticks to its will succeed.

The ~~S~~ocial structure is truly the normative path to success or failure. The individual is a mere puppet. He is determined by the superstructure. If it changes he must do so if not he is trampled down to death ; for Igbo wisdom admits that

(...) a man must dance the dance prevalent in his time (1).

Okonkwo has done so well that he has been looked as a hero with all the due honour. When he happens to refuse to dance the dance of his time he will be alone to face the disruptive new order. It will be the same for Ezeulu too who in a given time has refused to dance that very dance he uses to praise before his clansmen to justify his sending Oduche to the white man's school defying his forefathers' deities law. The two novels we are going to deal with are about the problematic of men's and deities' relationship.

1 - Arrow of God, op. cit., p. 189.

CHAPTER 3

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DEITIES AND MEN

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In the darkness of ignorance man has been puzzled by nature. He mused upon his human condition and fate. His instinct of self-preservation lead him to build a reassuring and comfortable world. He set up a system of explainable principles and stuck firmly to it. But nature goes on defying him. He tries and finds a refuge and calls it god or deity to overcome his loneliness. His intuition tells him that the sky is not empty and the earth/^{not}deserted. Man comes to gods by a very tortuous way. In this, he looks like his forefathers.

Abraham, the father of the believers in monotheistic religion has experienced such spiritual wandering. Without God's mercy, he might have lost his faith in one God. Abraham's processes of thought are that of everyman.

When the night
Covered him over,
He saw a star :
He said : This is my Lord.
But when it set,
He said : I love not
Those that set. (1)

He makes the same remark for the moon and the sun before the enlightenment of God. Abraham's experience seems to be lost in the mists of time if we take into account the persistent way some peoples worship their deities in African traditional religions just before colonisation and even today because faith seems to recoil for many reasons.

1 - The Holy QUR'AN, Translated into English by Ali (A. Yusuf).
Wimbleton : November 14, 1937. England, p. 309.

Nowadays, thanks to scientific and industrial revolution, man has almost got rid of God. Nietzsche's famous sentence is true in a certain extent. Man has killed God to replace Him. Christ is crucified again. God's presence no longer tells on modern man's behaviour. How does this happen as far as African traditional religions are concerned since Africans have been thought to be among the most religious men on earth. It will take a long time to follow and analyse such a process. Such a thing is not our purpose here.

All known human communities have felt the need to believe in God forever. They have manifested it in different ways. Despite some atheists and sceptics, man is fundamentally religious. Africans have been said to have no religion but the past proves the contrary.

Aucune institution n'existe (en Afrique noire), que ce soit dans le domaine social ou dans le domaine politique, voire même (sic) en matière économique, qui ne repose sur un concept religieux ou qui n'ait la religion pour pierre angulaire. Ces peuples, dont on a parfois nié qu'ils aient une religion, sont en réalité parmi les plus religieux de la terre. (1)

Religion comes from the Latin word "religior" which means link, tie, bond. Therefore in the primitive mind (without negative connotation) religion binds men to deities. Its effects are visible on African traditional society at all levels. It affects the individuals, the groups and the society as a whole. The instant need of deities is the direct result of man's incapacity to tame space and time at that period of life. The more he becomes apt to rule his destiny, the more he is inclined to reject gods. Primitive peoples were not up to do such a thing.

1 - DESCHAMPS (Hubert), Les Religions de l'Afrique Noire. 3e edit. P.U.F. Coll. Que sais-je ? N°632, Paris, p.4, citant Maurice Delafosse dans Les Civilisations négro-africaines.

due to their religious beliefs. Their faith was total. They questioned nothing. They clung to their deities in so far as those ones fulfilled their expectation in certain societies. The relationship between man and deities was ambiguous.

The multiple natural phenomena brought them to worship several deities and they became ipso facto pagan and polytheistic. The nature and functions of deities were defined by their worshippers. There is a dialectical relationship between man's state of mind, his technical progresses and deities. The deity is a projection of man's views upon the cosmos and the chaos, upon the microcosm and the macrocosm. The individual is and belongs to the microcosm. He is a frail being who confuses everything and every unknown creature or advent with his Lord. So he has many little lords as intermediaries. So African traditional religions are not easy to define. They have many common features. Ceremonies and rituals are identical but the worshipped being can be an animal, a founder-hero seen as an ancestor, a carved deity and so on. African religions have been called "animisme", "naturalisme", "totémisme", "manisme", "dynamisme" and even "vitalisme" according to Hubert Deschamps' analysis who explains to us what those different concepts mean. He adopts the word "paganisme" or a heathen religion which in the beginning was the peasants' religion.

"pagus : pays, canton ; paganus : paysan, païen." (1)

The anthropologists and the ethnologists have seen in Africa as many religions as there are clans or tribes. This view was not completely false but inaccurate since it confuses different aspects of traditional religions which were not pagan. Different societies organize their lives differently but the difference

1 - Les Religions de l'Afrique Noire, op. cit., p. 75.

was not fundamental. Many rituals and ceremonies can be observed from West Africa to South Africa. This may found the bases of African cultural unity as ^{the}late Cheikh Anta Diop puts it. Hubert Deschamps has attempted to describe that plausible cultural unity.

Animisme désigne la croyance à des âmes ou, tout au moins, à des esprits animant la nature. Polythéisme est la croyance à plusieurs dieux, totémisme celle à l'animal parent et incarnation du clan, manisme celle à des âmes humaines survivant au corps. Il y a de tout cela dans les religions noires, mais aucun de ces éléments ne prend le dessus au point de devoir imposer son nom à l'ensemble. D'autre part, dynamisme et vitalisme ont des applications extra-religieuses. Devant l'impossibilité de ramener les religions traditionnelles à un seul principe, le mieux me paraît être d'user d'un mot très général. Celui de paganisme, souvent utilisé autrefois pour désigner les croyances locales traditionnelles, en les distinguant des religions nouvelles oecuméniques, Islam et Christianisme, semble encore le meilleur. (1)

To regulate his life African man relies upon mystic and supposed superior forces apt to protect him against manifold threats wherever they come from. Religion can be perceived as a means of alienation or freedom according to one's standpoint.

The two opinions may be defended. But here our main topic is about African traditional religion particularly the Igbo one symbolized by the existence of several gods or deities carved out of wood or clay. Men being almost alike spiritually speaking around the world, we can apply the same analysis of different faiths - the difference is narrow if we consider the origin of the beliefs - to the main manifestations of man's faith.

1 - Les Religions de l'Afrique Noire, op. cit., p. 74-75.

The main interest to study Igbo religious life lies in the fact that they live in a forest far from the first contact with the white man who settles on the coast. They enjoy their pristine innocence. Those data keep their culture in its purest aspects because **unmixed**. Like many people they were heathen and polytheistic. This may seem paradoxical since they have one supreme god, Chukwu who lives in the sky. Besides, other secondary deities exist as his subordinates for minor tasks.

Man's crippling limitations as far as supernatural occurrences and mysterious natural phenomena are concerned, urge him to believe in something in order not to be mad or caught off his guard.

The Igbos gather their powerful medicine-men to create collective deities. Each Igbo man has a chi or personal god and an Ikengue who is the god of manliness in his own obi. The Ikengue is a

"Dieu titulaire mâle, symbole de la virilité, il a son image (ikenga) dans la case de chaque Ibo sous la forme d'un morceau de bois sculpté." (1)

The notion of God has been long to be materialized. First, man has looked for deities through heavenly bodies and the elements such as fire, air, wind and water. In his attempt to rationalize the irrational, man finds or founds gods. Then the relationship between the two was to be defined clearly once for all. This was not an easy task because conflicts are probable. Lucienne has put it aptly in Cheikh Hamidou Kane's Ambiguous Adventure.

1 - MORICEAU (Annie) et ROUCH (Alain), Le Monde s'effondre, de Chinua ACHEBE. Les Nouvelles Editions Africaines, Fernand Nathan, Dakar-Paris. Coll. Une oeuvre-un auteur, 1983, p. 61.

J'ai seulement voulu dire que la possession de Dieu ne devait coûter aucune de ses chances à l'homme. (1)

In other words, can faith in God or even in deities bring about a reconciliation between man and nature insofar as Igbo views are involved ? My answer is affirmative to a certain extent.

Is the deity subordinate to man's will ? Is the contrary possible ? Is a compromise between faith and freedom probable without any loss from the two ? The Igbo society we are dealing with may be roughly dated back from 1850 to 1921 but we are interested in the post-colonial religious practices. It is not easy to define exactly each other's place. The place of man and god is to be defined once for all to enable us to understand what is what among ^{the} Igbos. Their religion does not spring from nothing. It has followed a long process because it has been involved in the long period of human history. It takes a long time to shape man's destiny. The Igbos' religion has the many aspects described previously. ^{The} Igbos incline to give a soul to everything they see in their environment. They have an animistic view and heathen deities due to their agrarian activities. "Evil Forest", the "Oracle of the Caves and the Hills", Amadiora, Eru, Ulu, Idemili, Ani and Chukwu are the fruit of Igbo men's wisdom. Human religious history has given them right to a certain extent about Chukwu. There is a dialectical link between man's behaviour and faith. Fuerback's thesis on religious faith is quite universal.

Comment l'homme pense, comment il est disposé, voilà comment est son Dieu. La conscience de Dieu est la conscience que l'homme a de lui-même,

1 - KANE (Cheikh Hamidou), L'Aventure Abiguë. Edit. Julliard, Collection 10/18, Paris, 1961, p. 122.

la connaissance de Dieu est la connaissance que l'homme a de lui-même. Par son Dieu, tu connais l'homme, et de nouveau par l'homme tu connais son Dieu. (1)

In this thesis of Fuerbach, one cannot only see Christianity but each religion be it monotheistic or polytheistic. The main characteristics of the divine is the notions of transcendence and immanence. To sum up that word we can say that it describes the fact that God is in everything but He cannot be reduced to anything. He is in and beyond everything. He is anywhere and nowhere because he has created everything but is not the sum of those things and beings. He is the known and the unknowable as Ezeulu would have said. Man happens to rebel against deities. The notion of deity is abstract. Primitive peoples use masks or statues to represent them. Men make deities after their own images. This anthropomorphism has given us many deities and many masks. There are deities who smile, there are deities who weep, there are ones who are angry, there are ones who are indifferent or shouting orders like men among their fellowmen. The deities' faces reflect most often the temperament of his worshippers. The deities stand for different sensibilities and worldviews. Deities are male or female. The supreme God is thought to be infallible.

Religions deal with the forbidden and the sacred notions of sin, chastisement and sacrifice take their full meanings in that context. Religions determine each social structure because we will see in a further analysis that all religious principles are about aesthetics and ethics. A society without those two values will not survive. The spiritual

strength conditions the cohesion of the community. Man being the microcosm and society the macrocosm their relationship with Gods shapes the human destiny. Primitive man is not yet a superman. He cannot do without deities. He has to take into account their relationship at any time of life. The innate anguish before death, this great unknown has given rise to the most curious interpretation of human nature condition and origin. If man does not know himself he will not know deities and their respective place in the cosmos.

Il est de la nature de l'homme de réfléchir son expérience, de l'interpréter, de la formuler. Les doctrines religieuses sont des interprétations plus ou moins claires, plus ou moins complètes, plus ou moins adéquates, de cette donnée vécue fondamentale. Les formulations étant toujours opérées à l'aide d'instruments mentaux (images, concepts) empruntés à la connaissance de l'étant, c'est-à-dire de l'objet, il est inévitable qu'elles soient toujours d'une certaine façon inadéquates : le Mystère restera toujours rebelle à toute expression. (1)

Everyman has experienced the mystery of birth and death. A social philosophy has been built up on these two major advents to rationalize human destiny and fear but mystery remains mystery. Before those two absolutely unexplainable occurrences in terms of human knowledge many arguments ^{been} have/advanced. Why does death exist ? How is the Hereafter ? why life ? Why death ? Metaphysical questions have been partly and provisionally answered. Each society has given a comfortable explanation to its members. But who knows the Truth the ultimate Truth ? Man is anguished. The primitive believers gave a reassuring view of the situation. The deities and the ancestors are the intercessors between the two worlds and they agree with the Igbo philosophy.

The Igbo believe in the immortality of the soul, in its pilgrimage. Each religion has its system of explanations. The Igbo explain the worshipping of the dead ancestors by the fact that when they are dead their spirits are still stronger and can mean harm if one does not give them sacrifices. They are strong enough to persecute the living. One has to pay attention to what they want.

Il y a d'ailleurs en général, pour les morts, un don d'ubiquité assez large. Ils vivent au séjour des morts, mais aussi près de leurs autels ou de leur tombe, ils se réincarnent et ils surveillent les vivants ; ils peuvent les rappeler à eux et ainsi causer leur mort. (1)

Okonkwo threatens his sons to visit their compounds and to break their necks if they follow Nwoye's example by deserting his ancestral shrine for the church. Okonkwo intends to carry out this threat after his own death. Birago Diop has said the dead are not dead. Life is a perpetual beginning or eternal beginnings. Life contains death and death contains life. There was death before life. The phenomenon of the Ogbanje in Things Fall Apart explains partly such strange occurrences. An Ogbanje is said to be able to enter his or her mother's womb to be born as many times as he or she likes after he or she dies. Igbo medicine-men have a specific way to stop that devilish process of death and rebirth at will. Religion teaches us the beginning of everything and every creature except God in monotheistic religions. Traditional Igbo religion in its animistic aspect accepts deities as responsible for what may befall the members of society. If the gods fail to protect them they become unsubmitive and rebel against the divine power and authority. Igbo deities know birth and death. Men have made them so men can

1 - DESCHAMPS (Hubert), Les Religions de l'Afrique Noire, 3e Edit., 1er trimestre 1965, Collection P.U.F., Paris, p. 12.

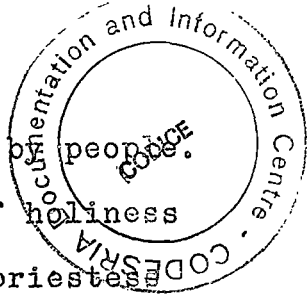
unseat them. Deities are subject to glory and downfall according to their own merit and capacity. The mood of their followers can be fatal to them. They are not absolutely infallible. They are criticized. They have ^{an} beginning and ^{an} end like everything in life. The Igbos transfer their feeling to the deities. Nothing is given once for all in matter of deities' power. Mortal men have mortal deities.

Là est la source des conceptions d'un commencement ou de commencements successifs : genèse des dieux (théogonie), de l'univers (cosmogonie), de l'homme (anthropogonie), et, complémentaiement et symétriquement, d'une fin absolue de l'histoire (eschatologie), le tout introduisant un sens dans l'histoire cosmique. (1)

The Igbos feel the existence of God in natural phenomena. But God is beyond the visible things. Man's mind can but restrict God's dimension to his own. Anthropomorphism cannot apprehend the divine manifestation in *its* totality through nature but it may give us a narrow opinion of the divine presence and potency. God has the gift to make sacred everything he touches. The paradoxe is that the Osu, the slaves of god instead of being holy are impure. The phenomenon of the Osu among the Igbos is informative in that sense. They are outcast because devoted to deities' services. No free-born human being dare marry them. The Osu are the estate of gods from generation to generation. In the eyes of the members of the society they are dangerous. They do not take titles. They belong exclusively to deities. To be identifiable the Osu are compelled to bear long hair. They must not shave at any cost and have to marry between themselves. They are devoted to deities forever. Here lies a contradiction within the relationship between men and deities. The Osu who

1 - Les Religions, op. cit., p. 16.

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ought to be closer to gods is isolated and rejected by people. This closeness might have been taken as a warrant of holiness but they are not saint-like beings contrary to the priestesses Thielo. When possessed by the Oracle of the "Hills and the Caves" she is transfigured and becomes someone else in trance, a sort of an epileptic fit. In daily life she is a normal and quiet woman selling goods at the market. When she is in trance she changes completely. She interprets Agbala's will among ordinary people. Agbala "the Oracle of the Hills and the Caves" can read the future. He can tell the will of departed ancestors and ^{he} transmits a part of his power to Thielo when he possesses her. Thielo has the same power than Ezeulu. Both are sometimes half-man and half-spirit. Thielo happens to be frightful specially during the night when she walks around the nine villages with Ezinma on her back.

But at that very moment Thielo's voice rose again in her possessed chanting, and Ekwefi recoiled because there was no humanity there. It was not the same Thielo who sat with her in the market and sometimes bought bean-cakes for Ezinma, whom she called her daughter.

(...)

Thielo was not a woman that night. (1)

The mediators of the deities - here Thielo and Ezeulu - are more than mere human beings made of blood and flesh. Ezeulu can see tomorrow according to his own words. Ezeulu's role is to watch a natural phenomenon such as the rising new moon announcing the new year and the rural calendar. Natural phenomena are used also to tell and foresee the future, Matefi and Ugoye's behaviour when they see the new moon is revealing as far as superstitions are concerned. The position of the new moon is perceived as an ill-omen. In ancient Greek civilization, people used to scrutinize

the natural phenomena to guess the gods' will. Relationship between man and god cannot be fathomed totally since it dates back from immemorial times. We cut into the past a trench of religious history on Igboland.

Si la régularité des phénomènes cosmiques est une expression de l'ordre et de la satisfaction des dieux (les Romains y voyaient un signe de la pax deorum), les phénomènes a-normaux, non conformes à cet ordre, bref extra-ordinaires, indiquent un dérangement des bonnes relations entre le divin et l'humain : catastrophes, comètes, naissances tératologiques, éclairs, prodiges, vols d'oiseaux etc., ; sont des signes intentionnels adressés à l'homme, indiquant qu'une faute a été commise ; la divination, a eu dans l'Antiquité une importance que l'on peut difficilement se figurer. (1)

The relationship between the Igbos and their deities has many resemblances with that of the ancient Greek. Maybe both stem from the antique Egyptian myth of deities. The deities have their counterparts elsewhere.

Chukwu can stand for Zeus or Jupiter, Ani for Gaia ; Agbala's possession of the priestess reminds us of "la Pythie de Delphes". The priests are usually chosen among the most *versed* people in customs and traditions. They must not be ordinary men. Ezeulu talks with spirits and deities. Each one of the four days in Igbo calendar stand for a spirit. They reply to Ezeulu's questions by naming themselves and describing their specific capacity and prerogatives. They speak in a very mysterious and awestricken-way.

I said to him : Is it you Eke ?

He replied : "It is I, Eke, the One that makes a strong man bite the earth with his teeth."
(...)

1 - Les Religions, op. cit., p. 21.

I said to him : Is it you Oye across my path ?
 He said : It is I, Oye, the One that began
 cooking before Another and so has more broken
 pots.
 (...)

I said : Is it you Afo ?
 He said : It is I, Afo, the great river that
 cannot be salted.

I replied I am Ezeulu, the hunchback more
 terrible than a leper. (1)

After being attentive to the days' replies, Ezeulu gives them presents and they let him pass his way. The spiritual manifests itself in the perception of the divine in each act of every day life. Indeed ^{the} Igbo are very religious people. They cling for centuries to their ancestral beliefs and customs shaped by their faith in deities. In Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God men and deities are now on good terms now have conflicting relationship because their respective prerogatives happen to be confused. The conflict of competence may ruin both. Ezeulu rebels against Ulu and Okonkwo disobeys Ani the goddess of the earth and Agbala the "Oracle of the Caves and the Hills". The two main characters trespass the social custom. They defy deities and their setback is all the more bitter for it. Before undertaking something they ought to be attentive to the deities' advice to avoid any clashes of interests. Relationship between deities and men cannot suffer **stubbornness** and haughtiness. Okonkwo and Ezeulu go on their own ways. To survive in traditional society is to be a conformist to a certain extent. The man who rejects the social ties is condemned. Those who do not understand it are not fit to live. The decisions of deities and the community are irrevocable when some offences are completed. One must be careful to that divine dimension for not ^{misbehaving} Okonkwo and Ezeulu are aware of the fact

that deities never fight a battle of dishonour because they must not be unfair. The deities and their priests must keep the community well-balanced. Men have to conform their everyday life to the directive principles of the ancestral order because it is the only reference for the community if its members want to secure its cohesion and solidarity. The deities' advice and warnings must be taken into account but not to be ignored. Ezeulu, Okonkwo and Oedipe's tragedy comes out from their refusal to listen to the gods.

Les Romains étaient particulièrement sensibles aux signes, et c'est en cela qu'ils pouvaient se prétendre "les plus religieux des hommes" ; leur religion était une "écoute attentive" du divin et aucun acte important n'était accompli sans qu'eût été sollicité l'avis des dieux. (1)

The dead ancestors of ^{the}/Igbos are most often old men. The older they get the closer to deities they become. The worship of dead ancestors is comparable to that of deities in primitive traditional religion in Igboland.

(...) an old man was too close to ancestors. A man's life from birth to death was a series of transition rites which brought him nearer and nearer to his ancestors. (2)

Heathen religions differ from the monotheism such as Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The three great revealed religions speak about one Almighty God who is the creator and provider of all living or dead creatures. He is Omniscient and Omnipotent. He is the Lord of visible and invisible worlds. The whole universe obeys him except Satan and his followers. Nothing is beyond his knowledge and power. These monotheistic religions

1 - Les Religions, op. cit., p. 22.

2 - Things Fall Apart, op. cit., p. 85.

have been the synthesis of a long process of heathen faith. Faith is not given once for all. It is a permanent request of the absolute which by definition is very difficult to grasp in its totality. All truth ceases to be true at the moment when we make the best of it.

Traditional societies do not go so far in their mystic research. They explain religious phenomenon after their own standpoint which is necessarily limited due to their knowledge level. The Igbos explain their polytheism by the fact that like man, god cannot fulfill his duty satisfactorily. Sometimes he need help, and sacrifices will do. The explanation of deities' existence is anthropomorphic. Man's weakness transferred to god and both need help. Weak men have weak gods. The minor deities play a secondary role. Hierarchical society uses high-ranking and low-ranking gods. The minor gods help Chukwu in the small works. The family father is helped at the field by his children too. Great men do great things therefore great gods complete great tasks. If Chukwu was alive among ^{the} Igbos as an actual person he might have taken the whole titles. The polytheists and the monotheists have the same notion of god that is why Akunna and Mr Brown are not on the same wavelength.

You say that there is one supreme God who made heaven and earth, said Akunna on one of Mr Brown's visits. 'We also believe in Him and call Him Chukwu. He made all the world and the other gods. (1)

^{the} As for Igbos, Chukwu stands for God, Yahveh or Allah. The Igbo's religion does not coincide word for word with the revealed religions. The angels in monotheism fulfill their duties but the Almighty God, according to common religious men's sense, can do

without them. He is self-reliant.

For Chukwu that is not the case. The confrontation of two notions of God is informative. It explains to us how does the Igbo's mind differs from the Christian one in matter of religion to a certain extent. Neither Mr Brown nor Akunna has won in their discussion. When Mr Brown denounces the structure of the hierarchical Igbo deities, Akunna's reply is accurate and persuasive. He explains Igbo God's status.

Your Queen sends her messenger, the District Commissioner. He finds that he cannot do the work alone and so he appoints kotma (court messenger) to help him. It is the same with God, or Chukwu. He appoints the smaller gods to help Him because His work is too great for one person. (1)

Akunna has not been to any school of the White^{men} but his argumentation is sound and difficult to reject. African traditional values are a school of virtue where people are initiated to their ancestral wisdom. Knowledge comes from observation and experimentation. ^{The} Igbo have observed for a long time and the sacrifice is the experimentation however irrational it may seem, this has helped them to survive for centuries.

Christians teach us that God has made man after His own image. If that is true, Akunna is not completely wrong despite Mr Brown's argumentation..

You should not think of him as a person, said Mr Brown. It is because you do so that you imagine He must need helpers. And the worst thing about is that you give all the worship to the false gods you have created. (2)

Mr Brown cannot make the necessary step to understand Akunna his friend. He is fenced in his Christian education. It is the

1 - Things Fall Apart, op. cit., p. 127.

2 - Idem, p. 127.

same for Akunna. Both are trapped by culture. The two men do not find a ground of understanding. Their respective relationship with God determine their attitude. One would say to each of them: "tell me about the God you worship and I shall tell you who you are and how you react to the environment". The psychological dimension of ^{the} individuals depends on their deep-seated feelings shaped by their religious faith. A widening gap separates the two friends in matter of religion. Akunna sticks to his ancestral heathen beliefs and justifies them accordingly.

That is not so. We make sacrifices to little gods, but when they fail and there is no one else to turn to we go to Chukwu. It is right to do so. We approach a great man through his servants. But when his servants fail to help us, then we go to the last source of hope. We worry them more because we are afraid to worry their Master. Our fathers knew that Chukwu was Overlord and that is why many of them gave their children the name Chukwuka - "Chukwu is Supreme". (1)

The fear of God makes ^{the} Igbo elaborate a whole system of values which can be compared to a "code de conduite". There is a pact between man and god. Both must not trespass it.

Ani the goddess of the earth therefore of fecundity, has punished Okonkwo because he has committed many mistakes by trespassing the divine law. First he has beaten one of his wife during the "Peace-Week", second he has almost shot Ewefi dead, third he has partaken in the murdering of Ikemefuna who used to call him father despite Ezeudu's advice, fourth he kills inadvertently the sixteen-year-old son of Ezeudu during the funeral dance of the last one. These acts are ill-Omened signs and to cleanse the earth and appease Ani, Okonkwo is banished from his father-land for seven years. The consequences of those mistakes and

offences to gods will be fatal to our hero. His chi or personal god cannot help him. Okonkwo acts as if he were cursed. Wherever he says yes his chi says no. The chi is an inner determinism, an alter ego of the main character. The personal god happens to rebel against man.

Chez les Ibo, l'homme a un double qui porte son caractère et sa destinée. Chacun élève un autel à son double. (1)

"Evil Forest" epitomizes the Devil, Satan or Thanatos. ^{The} Igbo~~s~~ throw the twins alive there. The outcast are left there when they are dead because they are offences to Aní. Those who commit suicide like Okonkwo or suffer hydropic illness like Unoka his father, must be buried in ^{the} Evil Forest because their bodies are offences to the earth which cannot receive them. The deities are now attractive now angry. They are female or male. In the same way there are male Ochu and female Ochu that is to say a sin made inadvertently is a female Ochu, the contrary is a male Ochu. Each kind of sin has its own way to be wiped out by performing the appropriate rituals, ceremonies or sacrifices required by the circumstances and the offended god. The nature of the sacrifice is determined by the nature of the Ochu. Okonkwo who dreams of manliness has completed a female Ochu. He accuses his chi of being female.

The Igbo~~s~~ are somewhat fatalistic. The deities rule the most important part of their lives. They do nothing important without searching for the deities' favour. They offer sacrifices to satisfy them and manage matters so well that everything they undertake may be fruitful because of the deities' consent. There

is a hierarchy of gods and sacrifices. Deities, Ikenga and ancestors need sacrifice. Sometimes human blood is ordered. Some sacrifices may be performed by the head of the family. But when the supreme God is involved the priest must stand up to perform his duty as a qualified God's servant and mediator. In Arrow of God Ulu is the most important elected God. Ezeulu his chief-priest, at a given moment has confused willingly the two roles. He does not seem to know if he has to be an intermediary between Umuaro and Ulu or not. So he happens to side with Ulu against Umuaro or to side with Umuaro against Ulu. Back from his exile at Okperi he betrays both side and manipulates deities and men to complete his revenge because he has been imprisoned without Umuaro's paying visit to him as for Ulu's priest. Who dishonours Ulu dishonours him. So he fancies he is the whip with which Ulu flogs his flock. Ezeulu calls himself the arrow of god. And Umuaro people are his victims. Man and God's clash tells on communal life. Then the relationship between men and deities may be very difficult to define if one does not contemplate providing for all contingencies. Ulu comes to power because the villagers decide so to protect themselves against the Abame warriors who used to enslave them. Therefore a god must be useful if not woe betides him. Umuaro once unseated a god when he was thought to be incapable to do his duty. The election of a god is a matter of consensus among men and medicine-men. Nwaka does not hesitate to defy gods when he feels that his own personal interest is threatened.

And we have all heard how the people of Aninta dealt with their deity when he failed them. Did they not carry him to the boundary between

them and their neighbours and set fire on him. (1)

The pact between man and deity is that of mutual help and respect, love and fear, attraction and rejection, submission and rebellion. If one betrays the other he has to pay for it. Man being supposed the weakest must offer sacrifices to assure his protection instead of his destruction. People apply their moral principles to their deities since they are the outcome of religious scruples. The notions of good and evil are highlit

by human condition here and now because sometimes deities are distant, deaf and dumb to man's need when they are not satisfied by sacrifices. They react sooner or later to man's offences like the Puritan angry God. God has as many faces as man has. God and man have more than one resemblance according to Igbo mentality. It is rumoured in certain countries that in immemorial times both lived together on earth but due to man's fault the deity left the sinful earth and went up to the sky. At least many traditional Dogon legends said so. The heathen traditional African priests think so.

In monotheism conception Adam and Eve have been chased away from Heaven by God because they had eaten the forbidden apple-fruit urged by Satan. They left the Eden Garden for the earth. Adam and Eve's downfall is ignored by many traditional religions. The notion of redemption may be assimilated to that of the sacrifice to placate deities.

Dans les sociétés primitives, on estime généralement qu'après une période paradisiaque où les hommes vivaient avec les dieux, ceux-ci en raison d'une faute commise par les hommes, abandonnèrent la Terre, mais après avoir enseigné aux hommes les

rites propres à leur permettre de communiquer avec eux, de même souvent (sic) que les arts et les lois.

Depuis les hommes agissent "comme l'ont fait les ancêtres" qui eux-mêmes faisaient comme le firent les dieux "pour la première fois". (1)

One does find deities among ^{the} Igbo in one of their yam festival. God and men are then given an opportunity to meet at specific occasions which renew traditional Igbo life. At that period of time the priest counts the number of Umuaro inhabitants. Every grown man comes and puts a yam on a heap. So the number of yams equals that of the persons in the community. If there is an increasing number people are grateful to Ulu. If the number has declined comparatively to the previous year a sacrifice to placate the gods was ordered. This festival is characteristic in the sense that it gathers men and deities. The festival is then more than a mere occasion to know the number of Umuaro inhabitants. It is a ceremony devoted to minor gods too.

If the feastival meant no more than this it would still be the most important ceremony in Umuaro. But it was also the day for all the minor deities in the six villages who did not have their own special feasts.

(...)

The festival thus brought gods and men together in one crowd. It was the only assembly in Umuaro in which a man might look to his right and find his neighbour and look to his left and see a god standing there - perhaps Agwu whose mother also gave birth to madness or Ngene, owner of a stream. (2)

Man has always carved deities to give a shape to the sacred. This helps him to set his mind at rest because a world without God is anguishing. Agrarian civilizations have elaborated a religious syncretism to explain the mysteries of life. Chukwu the

1 - Les Religions, op. cit., p. 23.
2 - Arrow of God, op. cit., p. 202.

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Igbo's supreme God lives in the heaven. He is too distant. The minor gods' statues supersede him in daily life insofar as there is no state of emergency that other deities cannot master. This founds Igbo vision.

On a pu dire que "les grandes religions" antiques sont apparues lorsque la figure de l'Être suprême céleste s'est effacée au profit de divinités inférieures plus proches de l'homme et de ses aspirations, et plus actives. Les mythes les plus riches et les plus dramatiques, les plus rituels, les plus complexes, se rencontrent dans les cultures qui ont dépassé le stade de la cueillette et de la chasse pour s'adonner à l'agriculture, et où l'Être suprême est soit absent soit amalgamé à d'autres figures divines. (1)

Ani is the goddess of the earth therefore she provides people with yams, the main Igbo food. Yams are very important and even sacred when Ezeulu's duty has something to do with that plant. It has a functional use in the counting of the new moon. Eating a sacred yam before the time is eating death according to Ezeulu. Ani who gives food, gives life too because there is no life without food. The link between that goddess and man is therefore unbreakable. ^{The} Igbo are peasants. The land is more than a factor of production. It is revered like the ancestors ^{who} are buried in. Many wars are caused by the dispute over a land. Okperi and Umuaro have fought each other because of a lot of land. In Umuofia a man has been imprisoned because of his quarrel with his neighbour who corrupted the white man's interpreters. The land is a means of wealth and a goddess whose anger is feared in Igboland.

When he (Aneto) killed Oduche in the fight over the land he fled to Aninta to escape the wrath of the earth. (2)

1 - Les Religions, op. cit., p. 33

2 - Things Fall Apart, op. cit., p. 125.

In Igboland man may be a peasant, a warrior, a medicine-man, a priest or a trader. We may affirm that God's function determines man's profession too. The contrary is also true. There is a phenomenon of projection. Deities can make or mar man. Faith has a sociological meaning which tells on the social structure and values that shape human being's behaviour and deeds in daily life.

'Le monde divin reflète souvent l'état actuel et parfois passé, de la société.'
On a vu que chez les Indo-Européens le panthéon est divisé en trois classes, comme la société humaine est divisée en prêtres, administrateurs, guerriers et agriculteurs-artisans. (1)

The yearly rituals the priests perform are the imitation of a godly deed. They are performed in remembrance of the god or to express people's gratitude for deities' gift to mankind, to a clan or tribe. Igbo people complete regularly rituals and ceremonies with pomp to renew the year. These events are expected cheerfully because they are the re-enactement, the renewal of the pact that binds men and deities or ancestors. Igbo ceremonies and rituals are meaningful and useful.

Man remains where god appoints him insofar as their respective interests are mingled. The deity is a force which triumphs over chaos so he is a cosmic strength which deserves to be worshipped and honoured. Without divine help life should be chaotic and unbearable among ^{the} Igbo. The beliefs keep Igbo society well-balanced spiritually speaking. God is a refuge, a spiritual refuge for human beings.

(...) en effet les forces d'opposition ne sont jamais totalement anéanties, et le cosmos ordonné est toujours sous la menace d'une rechute dans le chaos ; l'ordre est instable

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et il faut périodiquement réassurer sa solidité. La victoire du dieu doit être réactualisée périodiquement au moyen d'une répétition rituelle annuelle, durant la grande fête de l'année nouvelle. (1)

To tame Nature man needs God's help. Both are fundamental for the group survival. Deities are jealous and easily offended. They are tyrannical and do not accept willingly to be abandoned for their rivals. Ulu and Idemili's animosity originates from the fact that Ulu has dethroned him. This feeling tells on their respective priests and worshippers. Therefore Umuaro is divided into two rival groups by a mystic and moral dilemma. The opinions about the two deities are clear cut. The traditional clan which ought to stick faithfully to Ulu does not know which way to turn. The crack of faith is visible among ^{the} Igbo because man and god's relationship is questioned. Each individual has to choose with whom to side. Dithering is not allowed so is atheism. Faith is like a double edged knife. It orders the individual's daily life. Therefore a faithless man cannot be conceived in Igbo society. Faith buttresses law, custom and moral principles. Whenever they are questioned in the community one may expect its next disruption and destruction without any doubt, for ^{the} Igbo need to believe in some values in which they must stick to firmly to survive and make life bearable and meaningful. Ulu has religious and social function. His ruin is that of the community.

Dans certaines sociétés africaines, en Mésopotamie, le roi était considéré comme sacré ou divin, comme disposant des pouvoirs religieux, ce pourquoi il était tenu pour responsable du bien être social.
(1)

1 - Les Religions, op. cit., p. 60.

2. - Idem, p. 114.

Different deities may lead to different societies. But gods can be complementary in Igbo mind like Chukwu and the minor gods or having conflicting relation like Idemili and Ulu. To avoid such likely conflict between deities ^{the} Igbo have chosen Chukwu in Umuofia. Chukwu's power over other deities is not questioned contrary to Ulu's. Two religious Igbo groups have two visions of God. This affects their social structure and conditions the nature of their downfall. The paradox is that Umuaro and Umuofia's failure is the outcome of their refusal to take into account their deities warnings as far as the main characters ^{are concerned}. I mean Okonkwo and Ezeulu. Okonkwo has betrayed Ani and Ezeulu has done so to Ulu. Things Fall Apart maybe entitled "Arrow of God I". Indeed Okonkwo has paid for being the most prominent figure of conformism. He is a "faithful rebel". He is faithful to the customs even if he sometimes trespasses them. He has been a martyr. Common faith should lead to the same destiny but the Igbos reject their relationship with deities and lose their strength. They believe in themselves as a strong community apt to survive for its faith no more.

Dans (certains) groupes socio-religieux, les rapports entre l'homme et les dieux sont absolument cohérents avec les rapports de l'individu et de la société. L'impiété est un crime social, parce qu'elle sape les fondements de la société : même dans une culture aussi avancée que la Grèce, Socrate en fit l'expérience. (1)

The relationship between deities and men determine their respective social status among the Igbos.

1 - Les Religions, op. cit., p. 115.

PART TWO

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CHAPTER ONE

THE ROLE OF THE INDIVIDUAL IN THE LIFE
OF THE COMMUNITY

PART TWO

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IN Igbo community the first truth is that the individual does not belong totally to himself but to the different levels of the community. The individual lives at least in a family who belongs to a clan. The right of the individual as such exists but is subordinate to his degree of submission to the authority of the community. The Igbo man belongs first to his fatherland in normal circumstances. His motherland comes after.

From birth - and even before - to death and even beyond the Igbo man as an individual belongs to his community. He is born within the society, grows up in an organized group, marries within the group. When he dies he is buried among the ancestors if he has led a normal life. The individual's first duty toward his community is to conform to the established order. Ezeudu's funeral oration is revealing in that respect.

Ezeudu ! he called in his guttural voice. If you had been poor in your last life I would have asked you to be rich when you come again. But you were rich. If you had been a coward, I would have asked you to bring courage. But you were a fearless warrior. If you had died young, I would have asked you to get life. But you lived long. So I shall ask you to come again the way you came before. If your death was the death of nature, go in peace. But if a man caused it, do not allow him a moment's rest. He danced a few more steps and went away. (1)

Every step in life has a special meaning. Children are gradually initiated to the ancestral wisdom. Nature is their first school, then society. The young African boys have their first contact with farming activities. The round of seasons with the ceremonies and rituals which accompany it teaches them a lot of things. The

grown ups, particularly the elders, help them to read through natural phenomena around them and to explain some natural laws and regulations. Such an informal education facilitates their next social integration. After a severe initiation the Igbo^o children belong to an age-group which is composed of the children of the same age that is to say of the same generation if that word can be applied to such a case.

Liée à la nature, la vie individuelle l'est plus particulièrement au groupe social. La participation au groupe dépasse la naissance et la mort. Les ancêtres sont les maîtres des vivants, les conservateurs du droit et de la morale, punisseurs mais aussi bienfaiteurs. (1)

The village or the group of villages is the socio-cultural background of the Igbo^o community. Anozie O. Sunday speaks of the Igbo village as a "unité totémique, idéologique et religieuse"². Achebe has chosen a representative item of the Igbo^o community. The setting of his two novels we are dealing with is about Umuaro (six villages) and Umuofia (nine villages).

All told we have ~~five~~ ^{fourteen} Igbo villages. The names of the two communities have a common root which is meaningful : "Umu" means "son of" in Igbo. Therefore there exists a strong socio-affective link between the members of each respective community. The solution of the conflicts and clash interests must be found democratically within the community and nowhere else. The individual is a link in a chain, between his family and his society. The individual's role in the village varies according to his sex, age, personal value and caste.

1 - Les Religions de l'Afrique Noire, op. cit., p. 69-70.

2 - Anozie O. SUNDAY, Sociologie du roman africain. Coll. Tiers Monde et développement. Edit. Aubier Montaigne 13, Quai de Tonte. Paris VIe, p. 93.

L'ancienneté, le sexe, parfois la caste règlent exactement la place dans la société. (1)

The assembly of the elders sees to the strict respect of the older order. They meet to discuss any matter which may interest the survival and cohesion of the community. The conflicts paradoxically reveal how the social structure works. The social crisis is revealing. The virtual disruptive forces within the community may oppose families, husbands and wives, different members of a community, different communities or even an individual to his group. Many points of possible cracks do exist among Igbo people.

D'une façon paradoxale on peut dire que la conscience collective, le sentiment d'appartenance à un groupe précis est le plus renforcé là où il y a la plus grande accentuation ou articulation des conflits sociaux ; car au-delà de ces conflits, il y a d'autres forces primordiales d'unité et d'identité commune. (2)

The individual is not alone. He has a friend who advises, warns or flatters him. We will make an analysis of three flat characters to focus on the mutual help. Obierika, Akuebue and Obika.

Achebe has a way of his own to deal with friendship. Friendship is a universal theme and really exists. Achebe's fiction is a realistic one. A friend in the common sense is someone who sympathizes with us in our gloomy days and rejoices with us also in our happy days. He is expected to speak to us in a friendly manner and frankly. Obierika is a truly Okonkwo's friend. Whenever Okonkwo has troubles he is ready to help him to overcome them. He happens to disapprove the hero's actions too

1 - Les Religions de l'Afrique Noire, op. cit., p. 20.

2 - Sociologie du roman africain, op. cit., p. 91.

After the murder of Ikemefuna, crestfallen, Okonkwo makes up his mind and pays a visit to his faithful friend Obierika to judge his reaction about the act he has committed. Okonkwo's guilt-ridden conscience urges him to confide his secret to his friend but he is not a man to tell anybody what troubles his mind. He is aware of his torturing secret and he wants to see clearer in himself. This costs him too much because he is proud and haughty. He has suffered from trauma in his **childhood** and cannot get rid of it despite his persistent efforts in the eyes of his clansmen. Instead of talking about the very matter which brings him to Obierika's home, he begins with Nwoye's female behaviour. He tells Obierika that his hopes are shattered by Nwoye's laziness and carelessness. The good friend replies to calm him down and advises him to be patient with his son.

- You worry yourself for nothing, said Obierika.
- The children are still very young. (1)

The friendship is a recurrent theme in Achebe's two novels. He uses that common theme to make us see deeper in his characters' inner individual motivation to act in such direction rather than in the other. Okonkwo and Obierika's talking reveals to us a hint of hereditary signs within a specific family, that of the hero. Each individual has a genotype. Ezeulu inherits his mother's madness and Nwoye his grandfather's laziness. For Achebe it seems that the individual as such does not exist anywhere; that man is determined by his socio-economical background. Obi's return from England makes one member of the audience say revealing sentences.

1 - Things Fall Apart, op. cit., p. 46.

I tell you this is Okonkwo. As it was in the beginning so it will be in the end. That is what your religion tells us. (1)

Nwoye too has inherited a lot from his ancestor Unoka. The two friends are aware of it. There is no denying it. But out of respect for the late Unoka, Obierika does not mention his name. Unoka is Okonkwo's father who stands for failure in the eyes of his manly son. Okonkwo fears that name which haunts him night and day. The atmosphere they are in is filled with the dead man's ghost but decency prevents both of them from the abhorred remembrance of a man who epitomizes downfall and abomination. Unoka is more alive than the two friends want to readily admit. Okonkwo makes a long discourse upon Nwoye's effeminate behaviour. Nwoye as an independent being does not exist. He must shape his life according to his father's manly principles.

Nwoye is old enough to impregnate a woman. At his age I was already fending for myself. No, my friend, he is not too young. A chick that will grow into a cock can be spotted the very day it hatches. I have done my best to make Nwoye grow into a man, but there is too much of his mother in him.

- Too much of his grandfather, Obierika thought, but he did not say it. The same thought also came to Okonkwo's mind. But he had long learnt how to lay that ghost. Whenever the thought of his father's weakness and failure troubled him he expelled it by thinking about his own strength and success. And so he did now. His mind went to his latest show of manliness. (2)

One would say that Okonkwo is hesitating to tackle the gist of the matter for which he has come to see Obierika. He intends to know what Obierika thinks about what he himself considers as an evidence of manliness. Obierika condemns Okonkwo's attitude as

1 - ACHIEBE (Chinua), No Longer At Ease, Heinemann Ltd, London 1963, p.49.

2 - Things Fall Apart, op. cit., p. 46.

far as Ikemefuna's murder is concerned.

He condemns Okonkwo's partaking in the judicial crime. He warns him of a possible retaliation from the offended goddess Ani. The ~~individual's~~ deeds must be in accordance with divine law and customs. Obierika's words are prophetic. Things hurried up quicker than expected. We used to say the best way to defend ~~one's~~ self is to attack. It is a tactic as old as the world. So Okonkwo accuses Obierika of being afraid of blood. This one's answer is prompt and firm. He tells him what may come out of such an abominable act. Obierika says to him that he will not kill his own son coldly by his own hands if Ani had enacted such a law.

You know very well, Okonkwo, that I am not afraid of blood ; and if anyone tells you that I am, he is telling a lie. And let me tell you one thing, my friend. If I were you I would have stayed at home. What you have done will not please the Earth. It is the kind of action for which the goddess wipes out whole families. (I underline) (1)

Okonkwo does not mind what his friend has just told him. He pretends to know how the goddess has to behave in such a case. He almost dictates her his own worldview. Let us not forget that haughtiness has ruined many men. Despite placating the earth, Okonkwo seems to rejoice in what he has done to Ikemefuna. Now killing that one is, killing Okonkwo too because the murderer used to project himself in Ikemefuna whom he secretly admires due to his beneficial influence on Nwoye as far as manliness is concerned. Ikemefuna has everything that lacks to Nwoye. Okonkwo's life is ruled by manliness. Killing Ikemefuna, is killing the

ideal for which Okonkwo lives. Condemning Ikemefuna to death is condemning Okonkwo too. The latter should not ruin his own hope to see Nwoye become more virile. The assassination of the boy foretells that of the hero since things are taking place within a vicious circle because

As it was in the beginning so it will be in the end. (1)

Some individuals in Achebe's novels move on a boggy ground. Each individual's act weaves more his destiny. The judicial murder of Ikemefuna should not remain unpunished. Deities are not so pitiless before such wickedness and trespass of the traditional customs by Okonkwo who has gone too far in his zeal.

In fact no law or custom compels him to share the crime in the heartless manner he has shown. His action is revolting and disgusting. He acts willingly to satisfy his ego and under the impulse of fear but refuses to admit it in front of Obierika who condemns him harshly. Obierika *refuses to approve* his friend's ignominious actions.

- The Earth cannot punish me for obeying her messenger, Okonkwo said.
- A child's fingers are not scalded by a piece of hot yam which its mother puts into its palm.
- That is true, Obierika agreed. But if the oracle said that my son should be killed I would neither dispute it nor be the one to do it.

Obierika's attitude is wise. The difference between the two men is that Obierika is a thoughtful person while Okonkwo is a self-made man with all the possible deficiencies. Okonkwo respects Ani's will as long as his dignity is not at stake. Obierika is

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an intellectual, a humane being who questions the customs in a positive sense up to a certain extent. He meets our moral standards and quite understands what is to be done in certain circumstances. He knows what is forbidden and what is not. He epitomizes, like Ezeulu, the sense of compromise but the first does it without a surrender of his principles.

Igbo society can be flexible in its approach to the god's demand. Okonkwo does not have the fineness of mind to acknowledge the limit of his power as an individual. He ought to know that in Igbo community in a certain extent,

Le conformisme est total et les excès individuels condamnés d'avance. (1)

The tragic individuals wear blinders at a given moment, of their lives. To highlight the friendship phenomenon Achebe analyzes the relationship between the heroes and their friends.

Obierika and Akuebue are the spokesmen of the readers or the writer. They sound the main characters' thoughts for us. Akuebue is the known Ezeulu's only friend who can advise and interrogate him everyday. Their talking about the land dispute or about Obika's being beaten reveals us that the priest is not as harsh as he used to be when he faces someone who gainsays him. Ezeulu's behaviour is a calculated one because he is powerless before Wright. Ezeulu is aware of the white man's superiority in war. He is realistic where he feels his powerlessness. Ezeulu is conscious of the birth of a new world for a new order he does not control and which threatens his real authority over the community. That is why he keeps quiet. The white man is living at Okperi with his soldiers not far away from Umuaro.

1 - Les Religions de l'Afrique Noire, op. cit., p. 17.

My friend, let us talk about other things. There was a time when a happening such as this would have given me a fever but that time has passed. Nothing is anything to me any more. (1)

Akuebue has come to make inquiries about the reasons why Obika has been so vildly beaten. Ezeulu is ill at ease to explain his indifference on this very event. He accuses his son of behaving badly because he was drunk when he left for the collective works. In a friendly way Ezeulu explains his own behaviour to Akuebue. According to the priest his unsubmissive and turbulent son deserves his misfortune.

That is why a stranger can whip a son of mine and go unscathed, because my son has nailed up his ear against my words. Were it not so that stranger would already have learnt what it was to cross Ezeulu. (...) (2)

It is dangerous when a father of the family refuses to protect a member of his household. This behaviour is in contradiction with Igbo traditional value. His reasons are not good enough to account for his behaviour. It discloses Ezeulu's ill-hidden motivation. He fears to fight against the road supervisor. By this passive attitude he acknowledges his weakness.

Ezeulu cannot consent to be humiliated by an eventual defeat when facing the White's power. So he systematically refuses to make any further investigations about Obierika's case. Obika's humiliation should be that of his own father who ought to be his protector whatever the cost may be. Ezeulu answers curtly Akuebue who attempts to know who hits the first between

1 - Arrow of God, op. cit., p. 94.

2 - Arrow of God, op. cit., p. 95.

Wright and Obika since it is rumoured that Wright has flogged the first in a fit of anger because the natives were making too much noise. Obika has aped him too. This affair reveals the dissension within Ezeulu's compound. Edogo who was not asked to speak interferes and condemns his father's laxism. Edogo sides openly with Akuebue and seizes this opportunity to disparage his father. In that respect his attitude is condemnable. He must respect his father even if this one makes mistakes. This conduct is not allowed because it is at odds with the customs. An individual ought not to trespass the old people's right. It is a sacred ancestral law.

He (Obika) went out with Ofoedu. He went out because our father did not ask him what happens before blaming him. (1)

Akuebue senses that Ezeulu is now on a sticky situation because of Edogo's harsh words. He tries to cheer him up and make him forget what Edogo, his first son, has just said about his father's behaviour. Akuebue defends his friend as one may expect

- This is what I tell my own children, said Akuebue to Edogo and the two boys. I tell them that a man always has more sense than his children. It was clear he said this to mollify Ezeulu ; but at the same time it was clear he spoke the truth. Those of you who think they are wiser than their father forget that it is from a man's own stock of sense that he gives out to his sons. That is why a boy who tries to wrestle with his father gets blinded by the old man's lohn-cloth. (2)

The allusion is clear enough for Edogo to understand Akuebue has accurately expressed the gap of generations. He evokes the elders' right which is so valuable in Igbo traditions. This

1 - Arrow of God, op. cit., p. 99.

2 - Ibidem.

incipient conflict between the youngsters and the elders, and between the age-groups themselves is a small crack in the social structure till now. The elders' experience of life gives them the right to rule the community as Akuebue puts it so aptly. He sums it up.

You forget that a woman who began cooking before another must have more broken utensils. (1)

Akuebue is realistic and objective when he attempts to solve the conflicts in Ezeulu's compound. Indeed there are perpetual and latent conflicts in the Chief-Priest house. Akuebue's words are not biased. He even admits the right to have a different opinion from one another in a great family. This is a supplementary evidence of the democratic aspect in the communal Igbo life to a certain extent. After talking to the children Akuebue faces Ezeulu too and tells him what he thinks about his way to rule his compound. Friendship in Achebe's two novels is not a mere makeshift. It is always used on purpose. Friendship is used to buttress an opinion. The friends are the alter-egos of the heroes. They pinpoint the writer's view. Akuebue is critical as far as Ezeulu's attitude is concerned.

-Akuebue wheeled round on his buttocks and faced Ezeulu. It is the pride of Umuaro, he said, that we never see one party as right and the other wrong. I have spoken to the children and I shall not be afraid to speak to you. I think you are too hard on Obika. Apart from your high position as Chief-Priest you are also blessed with a great compound. But in all great compounds there must be people of all minds - some good, some bad, some fearless and some cowardly ; those who bring

1 - Arrow of God, op. cit., p. 100.

in wealth and those who scatter it, those who give good advice and those who only speak the words of palm wine. That is why we say that whatever tune you play in the compound of a great man there is always some to dance it. I salute you. (1)

The role of the individual within the family is to maintain its cohesion. To perform his duty, the individual must know his rights too. Ezeulu's household - the wives as well as the children - suspects him of being partial. Such an accusation is heavy of consequences in a polygamous man's house. Ezeulu is in an awkward position because he does not accept to be gainsaid. When the Messenger visits his house Akuebue prevents Obika from fighting against him. Akuebue speaks sweetly to the Messenger to assuage his anger and gives him bribery to calm him down.

Obika is prompt to defend his relatives while Edogo harbours a grudge against everybody because he is envious. To better the relationship within the community, the individuals owe mutual help and protection to each member.

Obika is aware of it but he fulfills his duty as he understands it : Quick-tempered because given to drink palm-wine, he reacts violently. We are told that he is very handsome and we know that it is a common belief that all beautiful things or beings have a sad destiny.

Obika is stubborn and wicked. Those two defaults lead him to do things in his own way. "Like father like son". The portrait of Obika reveals him as an anarchist, a non-conformist. His own fate can be guessed according to his actions

and state of mind.

Obika was one of the handsomest young men in Umuaro and all the surrounding districts. His face was very finely cut and his nose stood gem, like the note of a gong. His skin was, like his father's, the colour of terracotta. People said of him (as they always did when they saw great comeliness) that he was not born for these part among the Igbo people of the forests ; that in his previous life he must have sojourned among the riverain folk whom the Igbo called Olu. (1)

One day Obika calls his friend Ofoedu who is as quarrelsome as him. They go to a neighbouring village where his half-sister is ill-treated by her husband. At their arrival Obika goes straight away to his half-sister's husband and beats him almost to death. Then the two friends carry him on their heads like a faggot up to their own village. Obika achieves his task of solidarity and protection for his half-sister's sake. By so doing the two young men challenged a whole village.

There may be work for you. If Umuogwugwo people are what I take them to be they will come out in force to defend their brother. Then there will be work for you. (2)

Obierika is a true dare-devil. He happens to defy a whole village. His courage is admirable but he has not been wise enough. He might have been killed since he did not even warn his relatives. Back from their work the two young men show off. Ezeulu does not approve them when he learns what has happened. The relatives of Akuebue's husband come to negotiate his freedom. They even criticize the unfortunate husband who has not been courageous enough. Man must not completely relies on his

1 - Arrow of God, op. cit., p. 11.

2 - Ibidem.

clansmen. He must defend himself. It is a matter of manliness. Cowardice is not allowed. It lowers and belittles the individual and his clansmen.

We cannot say that your son did wrong to fight for his sister. What we do not understand, is why a man with a penis between his legs should be carried away from his house and village. It is as if to say : you are nothing and your kinsmen can do nothing. This is the part we do not understand. (1)

Obierika and the husband's clansmen have shown a good example of solidarity when they respectively fulfill their duties. The two main characters embody social values at their highest point. It matters now to try to understand what urges them to behave as they do in certain circumstances.

1 - Arrow of God, op. cit., p. 12.

C H A P T E R 2

OKONKWO'S FAILURE

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Achebe analyzes a process through Okonkwo and Ezeulu, the respective heroes of his two novels. In this chapter we will deal with Okonkwo, a characteristic Igbo man in his struggle for life. This man's temperament is shaped since he was an adolescent and even before by his father's behaviour. Okonkwo defines himself and can be defined by opposition to his father. He hates everything his father liked. This attitude enables him to win a honourable position within Igbo society since a man's place depends on his own merit and not on that of his father's. Okonkwo's success increases day after day. He is a good farmer, a skilful wrestler, a daring warrior. He has many children and wives, in brief everything that an Igbo man hankers after. To perpetuate the image of the hero he wears a sort of a mask and adopts a virile attitude wherever he goes and whatever he does. This makes him live in a tense atmosphere because he is obsessed by the fear to look like his father and to have the same destiny as he. That state of mind brings the hero sometimes to act ridiculously and arrogantly because he is worried about manhood and tortured by Unoka's ghost. Okonkwo lives in a universe of his own. He cannot or refuses to admit jokes. He sees it as an abuse to his person. When one of his three wives speaks about his gun which never kills he tries it on her in a fit of anger. His psychological tension makes him interpret everything as an obstacle to his manliness. He is ready to fight what he considers as hostility according to his fancy. He bears his manliness like a badge. He believes that the more you are feared the more you are virile. Therefore everyone must tremble before him like other animals when they meet the lion on their way. As

the fear to fail pesters him night and day, he rules his household by fear. Okonkwo wants to show people what stuff he is made of. He terrorizes his household. He confuses love and affection with weakness. Okonkwo's philosophy is that a man must have a hard heart. He rejects all that is assimilated to sweetness and femininity, because he does not want to be looked on as a female. His reactions become comic and betray the upstart who wishes to impress his family and clansmen. Okonkwo is self-centred too.

In fact he had not killed a rat with his gun. And so when he called Ikemefuna to fetch his gun, the wife who had just been beaten murmured something about gun that never shot. Unfortunately for her, Okonkwo heard it and ran madly into his room for the loaded gun, ran out again and aimed at her as she clambered over the dwarf wall of the barn. (1)

The bullet almost kills her. Okonkwo who seems so courageous in challenging customs and laws is shaken by fear. After his deed he runs to see if she was dead. He was panic-stricken. Fortunately for him. She was unscathed. The bullet did not hit the target. Okonkwo has committed another offence by attempting to shoot his wife down.

He threw down the gun and jumped into the barn and there lay the woman very much shaken and frightened but quite unhurt. (2)

Despite the many blunders Okonkwo has committed, he is a man of high principles. He acknowledges at once valuable men. When he thinks about Ikemefuna his heart is filled with hope and regret. He wishes he had a son like Ikemefuna who has beneficial influence on Nwoye his effeminate first son. Ikemefuna the

1 - Things Fall Apart, op. cit., p. 28.

2 - Ibidem.

hostage is more mature than Okonkwo's eldest son who is expected to succeed him when he rejoins the dead ancestors' kingdom. Ikemefuna embodies the values which Okonkwo wants to see in Nwoye. Okonkwo's household admires Ikemefuna because he has a certain experience and know-how. However young he may be, he shows rare qualities as a leader. He has everything Nwoye lacks. Therefore Okonkwo dare hope to think that he will change positively his eldest son's state of mind and everyday behaviour. Ikemefuna, a stranger, manages to handle well Okonkwo's children.

Nwoye's younger brothers were about to tell their mother the true story of the accident when Ikemefuna looked at them sternly and they held their peace. (1)

Even Nwoye begins to ape Ikemefuna in doing men's works for Okonkwo's wives. Indeed the frustrated child needs someone to imitate and an attractive model. He fears Okonkwo his father then he looks somewhere else for a model. Ikemefuna attracts him. They become friends and like each other very much. Nwoye gets less and less tense thanks to Ikemefuna's favourable influence on him and he starts disliking womanish manners. Okonkwo as the head of the house is grateful to the newcomer in the family. He is attentive to the slightest change in Nwoye's new behaviour. In his eyes his son has a sound judgement since he becomes critical about women's gossips and conduct to please Ikemefuna. Okonkwo and Nwoye would like to see Ikemefuna to stay with them forever. The two have different reasons to think so.

But fate would have it otherwise as we shall see further. Okonkwo wants his son to be his own image. He is given

1 - Things Fall Apart, op. cit., p. 31.

to admire manliness through games such as wrestling. For^{an} Igbo a wrestling match is a means to test physical force and smartness of mind. It is a ground on which one can undoubtedly affirm oneself before one's clansmen. Whenever people organize a wrestling match Okonkwo remembers his exploit in this field. He is a well-known champion and this very status proves that he belongs to the noteworthy members of Igbo society and he fears to fail to meet their demands in everything he undertakes.

Okonkwo cleared his throat and moved his feet to the beat of the drums. It filled him with fire as it had always done from his youth. He trembled with the desire to conquer and subdue. It was like the desire for woman. (1)

Okonkwo likes Ikemefuna very much for what the boy symbolizes in his eyes. But when it comes to sacrificing him according to Agbala's will Okonkwo is ready to partake in the crime to prove his manliness. He is given an opportunity to prove his courage again. Ikemefuna is to be sacrificed because the Oracle of the Hills and the Caves has ordered so. A wise old and titled man who epitomizes experience warns him against meddling in the next killing of Ikemefuna. As a "wolof" saying would have it "an old man can see the future while a young man cannot." African ancestral legacy is very useful and reliable. Okonkwo in his desire to show off does not take into account that wise warning. This will be his mistake. Ogbuefi Ezeudu is a man who does not speak in vain. He insists on his warning so that Okonkwo may not participate in the ritual killing of Ikemefuna.

That boy calls you father. Do not bear a hand in his death. (...)

Yes, Umuofia has decided to kill him. The Oracle of the Hills and the Caves have pronounced it. They will take him outside Umuofia as is the custom, and kill him there. But I want you to have nothing to do with it. He calls you his father. (1)

This passage shows that some links cannot be broken with impunity according to the wise old man's own words. Okonkwo takes no notice of the advice. He lies deliberately to Ikemefuna who suspects nothing because he cannot imagine such an ungrounded cruelty. He is not guilty of his father's misdeeds but the laws want him to pay for it. They believe in the infallibility of the ancestral spirits and divine laws. For an ordinary Igbo man to kill Ikemefuna is in the natural process of things. Nothing allows the clan to question its values till now : Ikemefuna will pay for it.

Later in the day he called Ikemefuna and told him that he was to be taken home the next day. (2)

The tragic event is that Ikemefuna is confusedly aware that people are plotting against him. What is happening reminds the boy of the day when he has left his parents after overhearing men's murmurs. He is asking himself if history does not repeat itself but he does not know really which way to turn.

As for Ikemefuna, he was at a loss. His own home had gradually become very faint and distant. He still missed his mother and his sister and would be very glad to see them. But somehow he knew he was not going to see them. He remembered once

1 - Things Fall Apart, op. cit., p. 30.

2 - Things Fall Apart, op. cit., p. 40.

when men had talked with his father, and it seemed now as it was happening all over again. (1)

Even Nwoye and his mother are mourning the unfortunate child's lot. Nwoye's mother has understood what happened. She sympathizes with the boy who is leaving the house for a sure death. To perform this bloodshed Umuofia men carry their "sheathed matchets"². The men who are walking behind Ikemefuna, talk about down-to-earth things to hide their anguish and to mistake Ikemefuna. As for those who do not want to partake in the crime they are looked on as

effeminate men who had refused to come with them. (3)

The act they achieve may have unforeseeable consequences mainly for Okonkwo who kills coldly the boy who is linked to him. The men are aware of that impending threat. To calm down their fear they become talkative for a while but bear a guilt-ridden conscience despite their dare-devil attitude. Let there be no misunderstanding about it. They are not so sure that what they are going to do is right. Their hidden feelings are hard to withstand. Okonkwo is having a debate with his conscience. He is wondering whether he can kill Ikemefuna unscrupulously or not. Killing Ikemefuna or not that is the question. His clansmen have to think it over in spite of their superficial cheerfulness.

But as they drew near to the Outskirts of Umuofia silence fell upon them too. (4)

- 1 - Things Fall Apart, op. cit., p. 40.
- 2 - Things Fall Apart, op. cit., p. 41.
- 3 - Ibidem.
- 4 - Ibidem.

A heavy silence hovers around them. The men make many attempts to break it. But in vain. Silence is indiscreet because filled with evil thoughts. Fear to be not up to the task besieges the men who must kill Ikemefuna. They walk behind him. They do not want him to look at them while they hit him with their machets. Achebe purposely insists on the word "silence" which he repeats three times to stress the inner struggles of the protagonists. Ikemefuna alone goes ahead while the grown-ups contemplate cold-headedly his next death. The quicker, the better Okonkwo seems to say to his clansmen because the silence is unbearable to the conspirers. The persistent silence foreshadows the beginning of Ikemefuna's end. Even Okonkwo's family has guessed.

A deathly silence descended on Okonkwo's
counpound. (1)

In the forest the atmosphere becomes more tense. The men are aware of it. They harbour gloomy thoughts because they are not sure to fulfill this duty without a great damage from the deities.

They argued for a while and fell into silence. (2)

Ikemefuna ignoring what is going around him looks forward to seeing his family. He has an ill-omen feeling from time to time and asks himself if his mother was still alive. At this thought he is taken aback. When he looks back he is ordered not to do so. Okonkwo is lagging behind. The boy begins to suspect something he cannot explain yet. He is undergoing a hardship. He dare not ask questions about the situation. When he makes up

1 - Things Fall Apart, op. cit., p. 41.

2 - Ibidem.

his mind and looks round a man orders him to look in front of him curtly.

The way he said it sent cold fear down Ikemefuna's back. His hands trembled vaguely on the black pot he carried. Why had Okonkwo withdrawn to the rear? Ikemefuna felt his legs melting under him. And he was afraid to look back. (1)

The men kill Ikemefuna in a very horrid manner. Okonkwo who was far behind ran to the first rank to hit his adoptive son whom he admired not long ago due to his obvious virile gifts. That act reveals Okonkwo's other aspect. He lives under the anguish of being detected as a weak man. He has not a lofty ideal of his own but obeys the established social order and regulation. He is a mere conformist who takes up his community laws and customs blindly whatever they may be. He does not question the communal customs contrary to Ezeulu or Obierika. He is not an intellectual but a conformist insofar as this facilitates his social ascent. He believes in nothing else. He has no aesthetic or ethics principle of his own. Even if he has, he is not courageous enough to live accordingly. One cannot prevent oneself from feeling like to spit on Okonkwo's face. He does deserve it after the killing of the poor Ikemefuna. The pure truth is that Okonkwo is a coward who tries to mask it by showing off in front of his clansmen. The motivation for which he murders Ikemefuna is so base that he feels sick many days after.

As the man who had cleared his throat drew up and raised his machet, Okonkwo looked away.

He heard the blow. The pot fell and broke in the sand. He heard Ikemefuna cry, "My father,

they have killed me!" as he ran towards him. Dazed with fear, Okonkwo drew his machet and cut him down. He was afraid of being thought weak. (1)

Okonkwo fears that his secret should be discovered. The only alternative left to him is to act to mask his weakness. A freed man ought to act according to his own conviction in certain circumstances. Manhood lies there but nowhere else. Manliness cannot be reduced to conformism. A man is someone who dare say "no" whatever the cost maybe. Okonkwo acted out of panic. He is an interesting case for psychoanalytical study insofar as he is an introvert. His psychological state prevents him from being true to his own self.

Okonkwo is piling mistakes up and by the same occasion he weaves his own destiny in accordance with his chi or personal god's will. The hero precipitates headlong to his own destruction consciously or not. He should know the customs and the deities' laws. In the bargain he is told about them by a venerable and wise old Igbo man. But as Achebe puts it so aptly, fate is blind.

When death wants to take a little dog
it prevents it from smelling even
excrement. (2)

This is all the more true because all tragic heroes are alike. They cannot escape their fate. Okonkwo is a model of success in Umuofia but he is a prototype of stubbornness and haughtiness too. He dares to defy deities. When Thielo comes in his compound

1 - Things Fall Apart, op. cit., p. 43.

2 - Arrow of God, op. cit., p. 226.

to take *Ezinne* to Agbala he almost rebukes her. Thielo threatens him because of his refusal to obey the priestess. Okonkwo cannot receive an order from a woman even if that one has a paramount religious function ~~with~~ ⁱⁿ Igbo community.

The priestess suddenly screamed.
Beware, Okonkwo. She warned.
Beware of exchanging words with
Agbala : Does a man speak when
a god speaks ? Beware ! (1)

Okonkwo respects Igbo customs and laws as long as they do not conflict with his own desire to succeed. To reach his aim, he is ready to rebel against his clansmen and deities. Okonkwo considers everything as a means to achieve his plan. He does not like people as they are but as he wants them to be, that is to say he obeys people insofar as his manliness is not questioned or threatened. Clashes between him and his first son are inevitable. Okonkwo dares to trespass laws to fulfill his desire of more success. His major concern is to have a successor worthy of him. He wants Nwoye to be his alter-ego. He fears that the changing world will ruin all his projects as far as his sons are concerned. When he dies he wants them to assure his passage through this earthly life to the spiritual one. This needs rituals from his sons. He fears to be forgotten when dead. He fears that Nwoye his eldest son will give a bad example. Till now the boy has not yet shown decisive signs of being able to lead a household with a heavy hand. This worries Okonkwo too much despite Ikemefuna's beneficial influence in this male-dominated society.

Okonkwo was inwardly pleased at his son's development, and he knew it was due to

Ikemefuna. He wanted Nwoye to grow into a tough young man capable of ruling his father's household when he was dead and gone to join the ancestors. He wanted him to be a prosperous man, having enough in his barn to feed the ancestors with regular sacrifices. And so he was always happy when he heard him grumbling about women. That showed that in time he would be able to control his women-folk. No matter how prosperous a man was, if he was unable to rule his women and his children (and especially his women) he was not really a man. He was like the man in the song who had ten and one wives and not enough soup for his foofoo. (1)

Okonkwo uses didactic means such as male stories to teach manliness and strengthen his son's temperament. He gathers Ikemefuna and Nwoye in his Obi and tells them readily

masculine stories of violence and bloodshed. (2)

Okonkwo compels Nwoye to obey him but cannot persuade him. By nature Nwoye is non-violent. Despite his father's efforts to harden his character he is still equal to himself. He sticks to his mother's female stories which are more sweet and conform to his pacific nature. To please his father he hides his deep-seated feelings as far as stories are concerned because he is aware of his father's quick-tempered mind. One never knows when Nwoye is going to burst out against his authoritative father whose views he does not share. The boy has a universe of his own but dare not live in it fully next to his father. This one does not admit being gainsaid.

Nwoye knew that it was right to be masculine and to be violent, but somehow he still preferred the stories that his mother used to tell and which she no doubt still told to her younger children stories of the tortoise and his wily ways, and of the bird eneke-nti

1 - Things Fall Apart, op. cit., p. 37.

2 - Ibidem.

oba who challenged the whole world to a wrestling contest and was finally thrown by the cat. (1)

This story has many resemblances with that of Okonkwo who challenges the rules of the community-life without knowing what will come out of it. Okonkwo's naivety in the long run threatens his social situation. *Grasp all lose all.*

Unoka, Okonkwo and Nwoye represent three aspects of times which overlap one another. Unoka stands for the past, Okonkwo for the present and Nwoye the future. These three characters have more than one resemblance. Nwoye is a dreamer like his grand-father. Okonkwo's tragic destiny resembles strangely to that of Unoka his father. The theme of heredity is recurrent in Achebe's works.

Past, present and future are the main dimensions of human life. Each is defined comparatively to the other and can teach a lesson. Nwoye understands his father's will. He pretends to be interested in his male stories to satisfy his father's wishes and to find security before him. Nwoye is a sly and shy boy despite his coolness.

But he now knew that they were for foolish women and children and he knew that his father wanted him to be a man. And so he feigned that he no longer cared for women's stories. And when he did this he saw that his father was pleased, and no longer rebuked him or beat him. (2)

When his father partakes in the judicial murder of Ikemefuna with the other men of Umuofia, Nwoye experiences ~~another~~ rebirth but a painful one. He cannot explain what has happened,

1 - Things Fall Apart, op. cit., p. 38.

so something dies within himself. He rejects in his inner self the values for which people kill in such a gratuitous manner. He is freed spiritually since he is no longer a member of the clan. He becomes another being after undergoing an ordeal. He was very attached to Ikemefuna. In killing the last one Okonkwo suppresses the source of a positive influence on his own son according to Igbo social ethics. In Nwoye's eyes life becomes senseless at least if he sees it through his father's own eyes. His father's deeds wake him up from a long sleep. The physical death of Ikemefuna is the spiritual death of Nwoye as far as Igbo culture is concerned. The dissension within Okonkwo's compound foretells that of the community as a whole. The gap between Okonkwo and his son is widening. It is the same with Ezeulu and Oduche. The clashes of worldviews begin at the heroes' houses.

As soon as his father walked in, that night, Nwoye knew that Ikemefuna had been killed, and something seemed to give away inside him, like snapping of a tightened boy. He did not cry. He just hung limp. (1)

Okonkwo is affected by Ikemefuna's death. He is paralyzed by guilt and sorrow. He is almost sick and cannot eat the food he is given. He has an inner debate, a soliloquy about his actual state of mind, Okonkwo the brave is crestfallen due to the death of Ikemefuna. He tries to forget about it.

When did you become a shivering old woman, Okonkwo asked himself, you are known in all the nine villages for your valour in war? How can a man who has killed five men in battle fall to pieces because he has added a boy to their number? Okonkwo, you have become a woman. (2)

1 - Things Fall Apart, op. cit., p. 43.

2 - Things Fall Apart, op. cit., p. 45.

To calm down his moral torture Okonkwo pays a visit to his friend Obierika to fathom his mind about the event. Obierika without hesitating disapproves harshly his friend's taking part in the ritual crime. He seizes this occasion to warn him against the goddess' impending retaliation. Back home Okonkwo sleeps deeply after spending three sleepless nights before.

Okonkwo is aware of his frailty before the cosmic forces but he is not the sort of man who admits his weakness easily. He is a self-sufficient man because he is a noteworthy member of the society so he becomes more and more daring. He is an egwugwu, a most important magistrate so he ought to know the classic laws and to behave accordingly instead of defying the ancestral customs. Social structure may make or mar him. He must bear this constantly in mind. Okonkwo is a self-made man who fears not to be up to his social imperative duty. This urges him to do things farther than people expect reasonably. Till now he has met success among his clansmen and family but brutality and haughtiness are spoiling and undermining his case. His behaviour is more and more controversial because he is going too far by taking liberties with the sacred and the taboos.

Okonkwo's wives, and perhaps other women as well, might have noticed that the second egwugwu had the springy walk of Okonkwo who was not among the titled men and elders who sat behind the row of egwugwu. But if they thought these things they kept them within themselves. The egwugwu with the springy walk was one of the dead fathers of the clan. (1)

Okonkwo as an egwugwu settles cases within the community. He is a guardian of the ancestral wisdom and must not trespass it in any rate. Thielo is Ani's priestess. Okonkwo wants to impose her his own view in matter of religion. When the priestess wants to take Ezinma to the Oracle of the Hills and the Caves, Okonkwo rebukes her, Ezinma is Okonkwo's daughter and this one must protect her since he loves her very much because the girl has a male temperament and in the bargain is an ogbanje. Human feelings conflict with deity's will. Agbala like many other deities may sometimes be a tyrannical god. Deities do not suffer being gainsaid. Okonkwo argues with the priestess who gets angry against him. She does not accept that a mere human ordinary being's refusal to be co-operative when Agbala gives orders. A deity's will must be satisfied without delay. Okonkwo rebels against the established order when what it proposes, requires or contemplates does not fit him. His conformism is timeserving. Before his household it is difficult for him to be submissive to a woman may it be Agbala's priestess or not. If he obeys without discussing this may be perceived as a sign of weakness. Now he must not yield to fear or weakness. He is aware of his role as a male who owes protection to his offspring and wives. Okonkwo is a complex character psychologically speaking. In the Middle Ages he might have been a knight but let bygones be bygones since time that is past will never come again. At last he gives up discussing Thielo's arguments.

The priestess leaves the house with Ezinma on her back. Ewefi the mother follows them around the nine villages for one night. Okonkwo comes and stands up before the cave-entry read-

to defend his wife and her daughter. When Ekwefi realizes his presence there, she is full of gratitude to her husband. Both are waiting now for Thielo and Ezinma to walk out from the cave, Okonkwo's courage is an eloquent evidence of love. His courage in that precise case cannot suffer any blemish. He does have a hero's status in the sense that he achieves some exploits which contribute to the progress of his community. He is too humane to escape a few major deficiencies. Okonkwo's case is pathetic. We can neither hate him nor like him definitely. He is hesitating between the individual's rights and collective imperative duty. To climb up the social ladder he must be both conformist and non-conformist following what is at stake. If one wishes to have an exemplary destiny one must do extraordinary things in accordance with social principles and standard. The hero is not the man in the street. If the hero achieves extraordinary things which are not allowed, such as defying gods, beating one's wife during the Peace-Week or killing a relative to prove one's manliness since Igbo society puts much values on manhood, one must be punished accordingly.

Under certain circumstances Okonkwo rebels. This repeated attitude will be fatal to him. Achebe weakens his character at will to have at last a well-grounded reason to destroy him without being reproached anything. In that respect Achebe has succeeded. The downfall of the hero is all the more hard because he has risen so high. Okonkwo's rising up has taken long and patient work while his failure happens quickly. The structure of the book proves it. The climax has lasted longer than the anticlimax or catastrophe. This shows that it is more difficult to rise up from nothing than to fall down from a high

ranking situation. Eighty-seven pages are devoted to the rising of the hero while only sixty-one are devoted to his process of failure which begins with his exile for Mbanta, his motherland. Okonkwo's misfortunes come from his arrogance and pride. He is never ready to yield a point ignoring that Igbo social life does admit compromises. That characteristic helps to soften each one's attitude. Okonkwo confuses flexibility of mind with cowardice. The late Ezeudu had taken three titles out of four but knows how to be diplomatic. Contrary to Ezeudu or Obierika, Okonkwo cannot manage to introduce light and shade into his playing. He is given to harsh and definite refusals whenever he is asked some service or to do something which may offend his manliness. He is always repressing his feeling so that he takes offence at many things. He refuses to be tender before his children and wives. His everyday behaviour weaves his destiny. One cannot escape his fate. Achebe can be suspected of naturalism since his realism is too pessimistic. He is gifted in destroying his character to buttress his standpoint on traditional Igbo society. We are never compelled to share his opinion because the readers are given all the details of the internal conflicts or the clashes of two cultures. Igbo cultural background does not permit the killing of a clansman or a relative **whether** this has been done inadvertently or not. Okonkwo's crime is pregnant with fatal consequences. Obierika has already foretold what may happen to Okonkwo in accordance with Ikemefuna's death. Obierika sympathizes with his friend in his gloomiest days even if he has condemned Okonkwo's action in bitter terms. A man who defies deities may expect severe setbacks. Okonkwo should not be surprised at what happens to him because he has been warned for a long while. He is like every doomed

hero. Sometimes he really deserves our pity. Destiny is like heredity. Both are traps for man to fall in soon^{er} or later whatever he does. There are those who momentarily avoid it but inevitably will fall in it. Fate is a sort of a vicious circle. It works mysteriously. We never know what will come next but we know for sure that the hero is going gradually to his own ruin by death or madness at the end. The hero's death is always that of an ideal how imperfect and unattractive it may be. First Okonkwo experiences a spiritual death however he has not yet achieved his mission among his clansmen. He is compelled to leave his barns, compounds and field because of his female offence against Ani. We know that Okonkwo always despises femininity which he looks on as a curse. His clansmen have rejected him. He is banished for seven years. This is hard to stand for him. His hopes are shattered but he dreams of coming back home to resume his place. But is it possible ?

Okonkwo is exiled for seven years because he has killed inadvertently a clansman during Ezeudu's funeral the very man who warns him against killing Ikemefuna.

Guns fired the last salute and the cannon rent the sky. And then from the centre of the delirious fury came a cry of agony and shouts of horror. It was as if a spell had been cast. All was silent. In the centre of the crowd a boy lay in a pool of blood. It was the dead man's sixteen-year-old son, who with his brothers, and half-brothers had been dancing the traditional farewell to their father. Okonkwo's gun had exploded and a piece of iron had pierced the boy's heart. (1)

The crime has been committed. The law is going to be applied without any restriction. Igbo social justice has foreseen a punishment proportional to each misdeed. The individual is protected when threatened by cosmic forces or external enemies. In the same way when he trespasses the usual law or custom he is chastened mercilessly if a sacrifice cannot suppress the sin. A well structured society favours emulation and punishment to regulate everyday life. Out-laws are fined, banished or put to death. Igbo society is a well-balanced one. No excess is allowed. Every man familiar with Igbo culture knows exactly what will become of Okonkwo. Igbo knows what to do in any circumstances.

The only course open to Okonkwo was to flee from the clan. It was a crime against the earth goddess to kill a clansman and a man who ^{committed it} must flee from the land. The crime was of two kinds male and female. Okonkwo has committed the female, because it had been inadvertent.

He could return to the clan ^{after seven years. (1)} After the female "ochu" the dishonourable exile begins. Okonkwo and his whole family must leave in a hurry for not being massacred in the morning. Okonkwo who has been honoured by the nine villages must now run away today leaving behind everything he has liked. He picks up quickly the wealth he has patiently hoarded up year after year. He gathers what he can carry with his family and leaves before dawn. He is chased ^{out} from his fatherland which is a disgrace and a disavowal.

That night he collected his most valuable belongings into a head-loads. His wives wept bitterly and their children wept with them without knowing why. Obierika and half a dozen other friends came to help and to console him. They each made nine or ten trips carrying Okonkwo's yams to store in Obierika's barn. And before the cock crowed Okonkwo and his family were fleeing to his motherland. It was a little village called Mbanta, just beyond the borders of Mbaino. (2)

1 - Things Fall Apart, op. cit., p.87.

2 - Ibidem.

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Few hours after their leaving, their houses were destroyed and burnt down to placate the goddess. Sometimes customs are absurd. If men made them, they ought to undo them. To wipe out the offence Okonkwo has lost a lot. He is almost reduced to nonentity. Traditions die hard. Okonkwo's redemption is a hardship. He deserves another fate insofar as he is the symbol of his society which by dint of rewards has shaped his daring character. He is a self-made man and his upbringing reveals many deficiencies which condemn him to be as he is. His own community culture has trapped him. He cannot escape whatever he does and wherever he goes.

As soon as the day broke, a large crowd of men from Ezeudu's quarter stormed Okonkwo's compound, dressed in garbs of war. They set fire to his houses, demolished his red walls, killed his animals and destroyed his barn. It was the justice of the earth goddess and they were merely her messengers. They had no hatred in their hearts against Okonkwo. His greatest friend, Obierika, was among them. They were merely cleansing the land which Okonkwo had polluted with the blood of a clansman. (1)

This event cannot let people indifferent. After fulfilling his duty as a member of the community, Obierika muses upon the deep reasons of such laws and customs. He himself has been a victim of ancestral wisdom. By solidarity he hangs on the laws but at the same time questions them strongly after his friend's departure for a seven-year-exile. Obierika's moral principles are hurt. He condemns the traditional laws which allow such thing to happen to one who is blinded by his faithfulness to his social values despite his momentary and persistent drawbacks. Man's dignity cannot suffer from humiliation. Now submission is in a certain extent a sort of humiliation. Heroes are not so base to

accept everything from the established order. Some heroes are saint-like figures. Others are not. They are humane, too humane hence their inevitable failure whatever glorious their past may be. Sad lot indeed ! Okonkwo depicted as a tragic hero is Achebe's mouthpiece to spread a worldview but not the unique and praise-worthy one. Obierika mourns his friend's misfortune but his conduct does not shake Igbo social fundamental base. He is concerned ~~in~~ some social practices. There is a little crack yet since an individual-and may be he is not alone - questions the "well" grounded reason of the judicial system within Umuofia.

Obierika was a man who thought about things. When the will of the goddess had been done, he sat down in his obi and mourned his friend's calamity. Why should a man suffer so grievously for an offence he had committed inadvertently ? But although he thought for a long time he found no answer. He was merely into a greater complexities. He remembered his wife's twin children, whom he had thrown away. What crime had they committed ? The Earth had decreed that they were an offence on the land and must be destroyed. And if the clan did not exact punishment for an offence against the great goddess her wrath was loosed on all the land and not just on the offender. As elders said, if one finger brought oil it soils the others. (1)

Okonkwo as well as Ezeulu are soiled fingers which must be separated from the not-soiled ones but by different means according to tragedy as a literary genre. Achebe's way to use catharses will gradually bring the heroes' respective downfall as far as the plot evolves towards the denouement.

1 - Things Fall Apart, op. cit., p. 37.

CHAPTER THREE

EZEULU'S FAILURE

In Arrow of God, Ezeulu is the hero's name. This name means the priest of Ulu, the natives' main God.

Because of this, Ezeulu occupies three important positions that we will try to analyse in this chapter. We will be interested in his religious position as a chief priest, his social position as someone in charge of regulating society and finally his political involvement because all these three dimensions of Ezeulu are narrowly linked as far as social imperative norms are concerned.

We have seen in a previous chapter that Igbo men are very religious people. Their daily lives are regulated by their beliefs in deities. Therefore the chief priest is an important member of the community if not the most important one. Ezeulu performs rituals and ceremonies which mark off Igbo community life as a whole. So the chief priest or the priest must not be chosen among the commoners. He must not be a mere human being. His status must be above that of the middle-of-the-road hero. Ancestral wisdom sees to it. The choice of the Chief priest is based upon obvious qualities because of his paramount role in religious matters. The fact that he has been chosen is an evidence that Ezeulu is not anybody. The Chief Priest has some knowledge in matter of religion, magic, and witchcraft. So he is an influential member of his community in that respect.

Made of flesh and blood he acts as a human being. He has a mixed nature because he is half man and half spirit. Therefore he is convinced of his infallibility and behaves

accordingly. This religious aspect is set on a well-balanced social background as far ^{as} the inner contradiction does not ^{yet} burst out to give birth to a fatal crack of beliefs till now. As a Chief priest who shares Ulu's secrets, he is liked by few of his clansmen and hated by the overwhelming members of his community. These contradictory feelings tell on Igbo society. Ezeulu's social position is another dimension of his being which must be taken into account to understand the different ramifications of social conflicts which Igbo society is undergoing and their **consequences on the** /institutions. Ezeulu is expected to keep the balance of this society by seeing to it that the customs and laws are not trespassed. He is the main character upon whom depends the survival of Igbo ancestral wisdom. This society is struggling against its internal and external contradictions. The threat comes from the facts that there are manifold intricate interests at stake. Clashes within that society are unavoidable despite Ezeulu's **promptness** to find compromises whenever he is in an awkward position. This attitude leads him to be involved in everyday policy to settle the community affairs.

He is a central character due to the fact that he is a sort of a demi-god who supervises the daily life and is watchful about the events which may influence the community destiny. Ezeulu is a human being made of flesh and blood. Despite his double nature he has qualities and defaults.

First his qualities - I would rather speak of his qualifications because his defaults are so numberless that they hide his qualities. He is rather a public enemy who has qualifications required. But those qualifications are not based upon

unblemished moral principles : Ezeulu has a world of his own.

He finds in himself the reasons and values which motivate his bewildering behaviour and compell him to behave in this way rather than in the other. His mixed nature and the three aspects of his being give him a special status among his fellowmen.

Because^f his social, political and religious dimensions Ezeulu cannot be a mere member of his community. He has a psychology of a tragic hero if we look at the factual level and the probable consequences of Ezeulu's deeds. Everything pleads for him to become a king in the broad sense of this word. He stands above the commoners. Now Igbo society is essentially democratic and does not acknowledge kingship. Everything must be decided after debates.

The relationship between Ezeulu and his democratic society is the first contradiction. Igbo society needs a chief but binds his hands by democratic debates to settle community issues.

Ezeulu is imbued with his power. He is proud and stubborn. Such are his obvious major defaults. Once he has made up his mind, it is difficult to convince him to change it : Ezeulu's social function as a priest is to perform the rituals, the ceremonies and to regulate the yearly calendar in accordance with the new moon that he has to watch in order to avoid miscounting the day of the harvest announcing the new year which is very important in a rural area like Igboland. The community life depends on his ability to watch the new moon. Ezeulu is an old man who is reluctant to admit his bad eyesight and ^{his} loss of physical strength inherent to human ageing. He refuses to accept

his physical collapse because of his pride. He does not consider himself as a simple human being like anybody else. He is aware of his supernatural gift as the Chief Priest of Umuaro six-villages. He is so proud that he thinks that he is better and stronger than the young men of today when he was their age or even in his ageing. The priest's behaviour is not exemplary. He wants to impress his clansmen to prove that he really deserves to be their beloved Chief Priest.

(...) because for the present he was as good as any young man, or better because young men were no longer what they used to be. There was one game Ezeulu never tired of playing on them. Whenever they shook hands with him he tensed his arm and put all his power into the grip and being unprepared for it they winced and recoiled with pain. (1)

In Igbo society a man is all the more praiseworthy because he is wealthy and wise. A man must be daring and have many full barns. Since yam is the man edible plant it is sacred and plays a role in ceremonies and rituals. Ezeulu uses it to perform his religious duty. He keeps "the twelve sacred yams"² in a barn. And at a given moment he starts eating them. From this we conclude that in Igbo community nothing is gratuitous. Each action is functional because the forefathers had shaped the values once for all. Even Ezeulu's acts are the re-enactment of the founding fathers' cultural legacy to help the community to survive amidst hostile environment by re-ordering the chaos of space and time. Religion is the means to discover nature's secret. Ezeulu reckons the days of the moon to know the exact date of the "Festival of the Pumpkin Leaves"³ which will fall on the third Nkwo from that day. As Igbo society is a democratic one, the

1 - Arrow of God, op. cit., p. 1.

2 - Idem, op. cit., p. 3.

3 - Ibidem.

Chief Priest must not keep the information for himself and his own village. The neighbouring villages must be informed as soon as possible. Communication is well organized within the clan. It is imperative to organize society for the profit of everyone. Society is hierarchically structured to facilitate collective work and specialization on a certain extent. Ezeulu is not alone in his precious work. He has six assistants who help him. They respectively belong to a village. The responsibility is collective ⁱⁿ a certain extent due to one's social rank and qualifications. The assistants announce the new moon after Ezeulu.

Umuaro community is composed of six villages. This gathering of villages, this sharing of responsibility and common destiny proves that Igbo people are interdependent. Ezeulu's temperament urges him to confuse the divine and the humane. He confuses his power with that of Ulu by his biased interpretation of God's will. He tries to analyse the true nature of his power and concludes that everything is allowed to him. Democratically elected, Ezeulu becomes little by little autonomous from all groups pressure and exerts his duty autocratically. He denies his fellowmen the right to contradict him and believes that he is God's gift to mankind.

Whenever Ezeulu considered the immensity of his power over the year and the crops and therefore over the people he wondered if it was real. The only restraint on his so called power is that he did not choose the date but he merely name it for the "feast of the Pumpkin Leaves" and for the New Yam feast. (1)

With such thoughts in his mind, Ezeulu becomes more and more dictatorial forgetting that he is a mere watchman. The Chief

1 - Arrow of God, op. cit., p. 3.

priest's power consists in naming the harvest-day according to the moon since Igbo calendar is lunar. Despite sacrificing himself for his community welfare, he secretly contemplates the disastrous drawbacks of his eventual blackmailing his clansmen. He deliberately violates ancestral wisdom by so doing. He is craving for a limitless power but in Igbo community such a thing does not exist yet. Ezeulu dreams to be more than a mere watcher of the moon despite the importance of this task. He does not want to be reduced to that customary routine. He wants something loftier. His inner debate is revealing at that respect.

No ! the Chief Priest of Ulu was more than that.
If he should refuse to name the date there would
be no planting and no reaping. (1)

Ezeulu holds a strategic position within the community. He contemplates all the possibilities to punish his community in case he should be defied by his own enemies. This process of thought gives us a foretaste of the impending conflicts between Ezeulu and Nwaka on one hand and Ezeulu and Winterbottom on the other hand. We will deal with them later on. Ezeulu faces his imaginary foe as if he was in front of him. He is training himself for the next combat. He foresees troubles with his community since the Okperi land dispute. So he is polishing up his weapons. This is a blatant mistake because Ezeulu underestimates his community by his controversial attitude. He is persuaded that he is answerable to nobody else. He expects people to account for their views and deeds before him because he is the intermediary between men and Ulu. A democratic society such as Igbo community must not be ruled as Ezeulu does. Ezeulu becomes more and more haughty and tyrannical.

Take away that word dare he replied to his enemy. Yes I say take it away. No man in All Unuaro can stand up and say that I dare not. The woman who will bear the man who will say it has not been born yet. (1)

Ezeulu wants Ulu to choose Nwafo his son as his successor. He wishes to impose his views in religious matter. He forgets his human nature and meddles with Ulu's decision. He is a daring man who does ^{not} hesitate to betray traditions and his fellowmen. Due to this controversial policy Ezeulu has many enemies within his community.

Nwaka is one of Ezeulu's mortal enemy. He hates Ezeulu because this one has sided with Okperi during the land dispute and has sent his son to the white man's school. The most important hidden grief is that Ezeulu is the rival of Ezidemili, Nwaka's friend. Ezidemili is jealous of the Chief Priest. Both think that Ezeulu, a candidate of compromise to the priesthood does not deserve to bear such a title since he belongs to the weakest clan among Igbo people. Nwaka is right to condemn Ezeulu's sending Oduche to school but his motivation is deeper than that. However Oduche's behaviour is condemnable if we know that each society has its totems and taboos. Oduche does no longer care about them now because of the new religion's influence. He even attempts to stifle Idemili's sacred python. In so doing the child opens another ground of conflict between his father, Nwaka and Idemili. Ezeulu refuses to **repair** that abomination as required by Idemili. He is not a man to accept an ultimatum. Oduche's behaviour is disastrous for his father's reputation. People become more and more critical

about Ezeulu's repeated mistakes. Ezeulu's tasks become more and more uneasy. Men rebel against him as a priest of Ulu and a leader within the community.

If the Chief Priest of Ulu could send his son among people who kill and eat the sacred python and commit other evils what did he expect ordinary men and women to do ? The lizard who threw confusion into his mother's funeral rite did he expect outsiders to carry the burden of honouring his dead ?" (1)

Despite his friend's warnings Ezeulu goes on his own way. He challenges his whole community. The priest of course does not share Akuebue's views on his own behaviour and motivation. The priest believes that everything he did now is right. His arguments are apparently logic. He asserts that it is not him who starts the war against Okperi which enables the white man to step in. He explains this by the fact that his clansmen go to war against their blood brothers of Okperi as if they had forgotten that

When two brothers fight, a stranger reaps the harvest. (...) (2)

Akuebue may be perceived as the writer's spokesman and stands for the community while Nwaka is somewhat demagogic because blinded by his partiality.

Ezeulu adequately appreciates the white man's superiority in weapon and means. He is amazed by this new power and hopes to use it in his own advantage. The white man's know-how has seduced him. He secretly fears this unknown force and sides with him against his clansmen, another big mistake. The priest is inspired by God, that is why his decisions are irrevocable. He

1 - Arrow of God, op. cit., p. 125.

2 - Ibidem.

sticks to his own opinion despite the community opposition.

I have my own way and I shall follow it. I can see things where others men are blind. That is why I am Known and the same time I am Unknowable (...). I can see tomorrow, that is why I can tell Umuaro : come out from this because there is death there or do this because there is profit in it. (1)

Ezeulu's argumentation seems sound but we cannot be sure that the next events will give him reason. He has sent Oduche to school to be his ears and eyes in the white man's house. This one, after due thought believes that Ezeulu is the right man to be appointed as a warrant chief. Now ^{the} Igbo know no king. The clash of cultures between Ezeulu and Winterbottom is another element which pleads for Ezeulu's downfall. The Chief Priest refuses the offer. This shocks Winterbottom's assistant. Clark puts him in jail, a supreme humiliation for the Chief Priest of Ulu. Imprisoned, he intends to carry out his revenge against his clansmen who do nothing to prevent him from being ridiculed by the white man, his friend. While sojourning in prison he has had a nightmare which foretells the next ruin of ancestral beliefs. Instead of redeeming himself, Ezeulu harbours a grudge against Umuaro as a whole. He willingly forgets his true role within society. In his blindness he believes that Ulu will side with him against his community while the deity does nothing against Clark. The Chief Priest interprets accurately his nightmarish vision but does not behave consequently. His vision sums up the next tragic events. At the beginning of his dream it is his grand-father who is shouted at but at the end it is Ezeulu himself who stands before the assembly of the elders.

Then the people seized the Chief Priest who had changed from Ezeulu's grand-father to himself and began to push him from one group to another.

Some spat on his face and called him the priest of a dead god. (1) (I underline)

It should be better for Ezeulu to analyse in a realistic manner the new data which rise from his subconscious. A freudian analysis would reveal that Ezeulu's hidden feelings and deep-seated motivations rise at broad daylight and highlight his inner struggle. His nightmare illustrates his fear to fail to overcome his foes. Umuaro and white administration are his two enemies now. Curiously enough he seizes but one aspect of this conflict: the easier one to solve that is to say his matters in dispute with Umuaro. Ezeulu is vindictive. He deliberately avoids fighting British administration. He mistakes his enemy. Two reasons may be held responsible for Ezeulu's numerous blunders. Either he is afraid of the white man's power or he is very realistic to fight him openly. Therefore he is a coward who masks his cowardice by an unexplainable stubbornness. To prove his valour in his own eyes and to mislead his clansmen he needs to struggle against someone or something. So he confronts his own community confusing his enemies and his friends. The tragic dimension of the hero leads him from one mistake to another. He gradually steps forwards to his own destruction. He does not care about his community cohesion and he becomes ipso facto an objective but unconscious ally of the administration, the main external disruptive force of Igbo community-life. The "hubris" prevents him from taking into account the whole elements of the two-pole conflict. We are flabbergasted when we know Ezeulu's Machiavellian purpose. He intends to hit his clansmen to avenge himself for being humiliated.

(...) His quarrel with the white man was insignificant beside the matter he must settle with his

own people. For years he had been warning Umuaro not to allow a few jealous men to lead them into the bush. But they had stopped both ears with fingers. (1)

While having such thought he is in prison. He can no longer support this situation. According to him the intermediaries between him and Winterbottom are responsible for what happens to him. He wishes Winterbottom were here. Winterbottom's intentions seem suspect to the Priest because things are gone too far. Ezeulu undergoes a hardship silently because his title and what he stands for are helpless to him. He is powerless and doomed to act in despair. He muses over his lot but cannot find a way out of it. So he becomes wicked. Ezeulu the protector turns out to be a sadistic destroyer. He is fully aware of what will happen if he carries out his disastrous decision of revenge.

But in spite all of this Ezeulu's dominant feeling was that more or less he was now even with the white man. He has not yet said the last word to him, but for the moment his real struggle was with his own people and the white man was, without knowing it, his ally. The longer he was kept in Okperi the greater his grievance and his resources for the fight. (2)

After his release Ezeulu goes back home confident in himself and ready to challenge his own society forgetting his own words about dissensions within the community. He reproaches his clansmen of behaving as if he were not their Chief Priest. Ezeulu is a narrow-minded man in thinking and reasoning likewise. Not long ago he was not helping his fellow country men when he took some major decisions affecting Umuaro life. Ezeulu has forgotten his own wrong doings. He decides to delay his revenge till the harvest season when Umuaro is weaker due to the critical

1 - Arrow of God, op. cit., p. 160.

2 - Idem, p. 176.

period when people are short of food. Ezeulu has gone too far indeed for Ulu to notice. The deity disapproves his priest's intentions and acts.

"Who told you this was your own fight ?" (1)

Ezeulu has seen clear through himself now. He explains what happens to him by fate. He is convinced that Oduche and Winterbottom are Ulu's puppets to fulfill his own purpose against the Chief Priest. Tragic conclusion indeed for Ezeulu !

He was no more than an arrow in the bow of his god. (2)

Instead of taking his share of responsibility for his acts, Ezeulu plays Pontius Pilate's role but the dice are cast. Despite Ulu's warnings, advices and threats he stands against his clansmen. He is ready to flog Umuro instead of defending it against its internal and external enemies as one may expect. Ezeulu is an actual danger to his community. Each Igbo man is responsible for his detention because no one has raised a finger to protest. Silence is guilt Ezeulu seems to say.

Meanwhile the white man manages to return Oduche against his own father and people. He commits ^{an} abomination. But for Ezeulu's behaviour, so many cracks will not happen so soon. Love and charity ought to be his main characteristics. He should have been a self-sacrificing man because according to his own words, Oduche has been sacrificed to the new religion to save the clan besieged by external impending danger. Ezeulu should follow his son's example as far as native religion is concerned. The priest must sacrifice himself to protect his community

1 - Arrow of God, op. cit., pp. 189-190.

2 - Idem, p. 192.

instead of misinterpreting religion for his own desire of revenge. Ezeulu decides to retaliate after a while. His refusal to eat the remaining yams because of his imprisonment delays the feast of the new yam and nobody dare trespass Ezeulu's prerogative to perform his sacred duty because it is Ulu who is honoured through this festival. If Ezeulu does not eat the remaining sacred yams there will be neither reaping nor planting. And he refuses. He wants to starve them to death. Does such a man deserve to be appointed Chief-Priest of Ulu who is called the saviour? The farming activities are linked to the new moon. Ezeulu refuses to announce it under the pretext that it is not the time yet and that he has no lesson to receive from his six assistants and the ten elders who are sent to him to beg or to force him to perform his religious duty as a Chief Priest. Ezeulu dismisses his assistants by telling them that it is beyond their competence to count the days of the moon.

In rebuking his assistants Ezeulu rebels against his own community. In so doing he increases social tension. Ezeulu's own son sums up the situation in a prophetic way. Nwafo sings a song which foretells the next outcome of the two cultural clashes. These clashes are possible because of the internal contradictions and conflicts. The song is a bad omen. Ezeulu understands it as such. When Ezeulu asks the boys what they are singing. One of them answers :

We were saying : Python, run !
There is a Christian here. (1)

Back to their respective village the assistants inform their fellowmen who grasp at once all that such an attitude implies.

The news spread over Umuaro. People discuss the pros and the cons of Ezeulu's deeds. Umuaro sends ten representatives to discuss the matter with Ezeulu and find a ground of understanding. These venerable men know up to what point the custom can be softened since everything is not established once for all. The ten elders epitomize the villagers' wisdom. They understand many things and events. Ezeulu refuses to obey the ultimatum of announcing the new moon. Ezeulu rejects all the arguments of the elders who finally leave him. According to Ezeulu asking him to eat the sacred yams is asking him to eat death.

In special circumstances one must take special measures. Umuaro custom is not so rigid because it has been made by men for the survival of the group. It must be subject to modification if it turns out to be a means of destruction as Ezeulu intends to use it despite the warning and advice of his wisest fellowmen. The ten elders are ready to sacrifice themselves if Ulu wants to chastise Ezeulu for eating the yams to save Umuaro. To cut his interlocutors' argumentation down, the priest declares that he is used by Ulu to whip his people. He is lying because he hangs on his revenge. To carry out his plot he pretends to side with the deity against his clansmen. However he has been elected by Umuaro people but not by Ulu. After "consulting" Ulu on the situation prevailing in Umuaro Ezeulu declares that

(...) his consultation with the deity had produced no result and that the six villages would be locked in the old year for two moons longer spread such alarm as had not been known in Umuaro in living memory. (1)

Because of Ezeulu's attitude Umuaro is **starving**, Opinions are set at variance. Ezeulu's household is secluded. The children

sing Ezeulu's wickedness around the six villages. Ezeulu's own family is disrupted. Ulu's priest has brought famine and death among Igbos. People are fed up now with such suffering. They desecrate ancestral custom. Even the oracle decision is questioned by a young man whose father's spirit asks to sacrifice a bull for the rest of his soul. He rebels against such a decision. Such thing had never happened before. His answer is harsh.

Ask my father if he left as much as a fowl
for me. (1)

The rites of burial cannot be performed without a yam. Umuaro is **buying** foreign yams from their neighbouring clans. They eat them secretly but Ezeulu has not that possibility. Ezeulu pretends to defend the religious orthodoxy that he is trespassing every day. Ezeulu's family suffers harder than most families. The punishment becomes a vicious circle.

The plight of Umuaro lay more heavily on Ezeulu and his family than other people knew. In the Chief Priest's compound nobody could think of indulging in the many old and new evasions which allowed others to eat an occasional new yam be it local or foreign. (2)

Fenced in his ivory tower for a long time, Ezeulu is curious to know what Umuaro ^{is doing} /but nobody tells him. After a while the Christians' propose to make people reap the yams in the name of the son. Akuebue who tells Ezeulu the news sums up the situation well.

It troubles me he said, because it looks like the saying of our ancestors that when brothers fight to death a stranger inherits their father's estate. (3)

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- 1 - Arrow of God, op. cit., p. 128.
2 - Idem, p. 218.
3 - Idem, p. 220.

At this same period the conflict between Ezeulu and Oduche is enlivened by this news from the Church. Oduche does not tell his father what his teacher has said to Umuaro about their proposal to harvest in the name of the Christ. Ezeulu who wants Oduche to be his eyes among the white men feels betrayed by his own son as he has himself betrayed Ulu and Umuaro by acting unfairly according to his own fantasy. Oduche is his father's escape-goat now. Ezeulu is angry against him because he has ruined all his plans by refusing to be his eyes and ears next to the white man's house.

- Do you remember, Oduche, what I told you when I sent you among those people ?
- Oduche shifted his eyes to the big toe of his **right foot which he placed a little forwards (...).**
- Go away and rejoice that your father cannot count on you.
- I say go away from here, lizard that ruined his mother's funeral. (1)

At last Ezeulu eats the remaining yams but it was too late. He beats the drum to announce the news. He has had another promotion at night and when he wakes up all is clear like the daylight reality. He even hears murmuring voices around him in his compound from everywhere. The second song he hears is an ill-omen one. It is that of the Idemili's python death. The theme of ruin and death has been treated more than once in the novels of Achebe. Dreams and songs are allegorically used to buttress the notions of ruin and death. Ezeulu the Chief Priest of Ulu who was responsible for announcing the deity's will and the people's aspirations is now the death-symbol. Each coming supernatural bad occurrence befalling Umuaro hits him first because he is the first to betray ancestral wisdom which he ought to defend firmly against alien forces. He has shown himself too

1 - Arrow of God, op. cit., p.221.

co-operative with the white therefore he has to pay for it.

They sang the song with which a man was carried
to the bush for burial.

Look ! a python

Look ! a python

Yes, it lies across the way. (1)

Everything is crumbling down. Ezeulu's compound is deserted by his two wives and their children. Whenever he rushes in one Obi he finds it empty. Green grass and cold ashes cover the internal ground of the Obi. This event is an aspect of the ruin of his own family. Ezeulu faces his fate alone now. He is disturbed and spends restless nights. All things that give a sense to his life disappear little by little. The song of the solitary singer reminds him that of his own mother when she was madness-stricken. That song confuses with that of the python too. The cracking of the spiritual universe foretells that of the physical universe. Ezeulu has always feared that very event because it is too meaningful for him. He cannot fail to understand the meaning of such a song. It means ruin, madness and death. The hereditary madness is loitering around. Tragic end indeed ! The song is a reproachful one too. The singer lies, the blame on Ezeulu. It is too much for the priest to support.

I was born when lizards were in ones and twos.
A child of Idemili. The difficult tear-drops of
Sky's first weeping drew my spots. Being Sky.
born I walked the earth with royal gait. And
mourners saw me coiled across their path.

But of late

A strange bell

Has been ringing a song of desolation :

Leave your yams and cocoyams

And come to school.

And I must scuttle away in haste

When children in play or in earnest cry :

Look ! a Christian is on the way.

Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha. (2)

1 - Arrow of God, op. cit., p. 221.

2 - Idem, p. 223.

This song and the previous one deals with the recurrent themes of death and ruin. Both songs sum up the conflict of two cultures. "Yes it (the python) lies across the way" and "Look ! a Christian is on the way" are meaningful. The "way" here stands for ancestral customs and values. The python embodies traditions or the old order whereas the Christian faith represents the new order which makes ring a "strange bell". If "the python lies across their path" the Christians are compelled to trample it to death before conquering Umuaro. It is a matter of survival for the fittest. The clashes of the two worlds are unavoidable. Ezeulu is hit through his beloved son Obika. That fact proves in his eyes, Ulu's hostility and betrayal. The priest thinks himself to be faultless.

Some villagers ask Obika to run the Ogbazulobolo or the night-spirit. He accepts unwillingly after evoking his fever as a motif of a reasonable refusal but he is morally condemned to accept to run around the six villages because he is the fastest young man in the villages. If he refuses his family will be pilloried once more. Obika wants to redeem his father in the eyes of the Igbo community despite the peril he runs while fulfilling the Ogbazulobolo. The priest's son is sacrificing himself to save his family's reputation strongly shaken. Ezeulu is indirectly responsible for what will become of Obika whatever he may think. He must be aware of his guilt-ridden conscience so much so that he thinks over the implication of that matter. Obika helps those who reject his father's authority by performing a ceremony before the new yam reaping is ordered, trespassing his own father's strict measures against the community.

- True said Obika.
I agree but I am agreeing in cowardice. If I say no, Obika told himself,
- they will say that Ezeulu and his family have revealed a second time their determination to wreck the burial of their village man who did not harm to them. (1)

While fulfilling what he thinks to be his duty towards his clansmen Obika dies all of a sudden and mysteriously. The body is brought to Ezeulu who becomes distracted when he sees it. He has had a heavy blow to stand with. Then he rebels openly against Ulu.

- What happened to him ? Who did this ? I said who ? Ozumba began to explain but Ezeulu did not hear. The machet fell from his hand and he slumped down on both knees beside the body.
- My son, he cried. Ulu, were you there when this happened to me ?
He hid his face on Obika's chest. (2)

Consequently the Igbo community builds a new wisdom on Ezeulu's misfortune. If Ulu can no longer rescue his priest, *it is* not worth ~~the being~~ worshipped. Achebe uses similes to pinpoint the common feeling over Igbo society. Ulu is regarded as a betrayer. Some similes will be enough to illustrate what we mean by the new wisdom of Umwaro which is very critical as far as Ulu is concerned.

Who ever sent his son up the palm to gather nuts and then took an axe and felled the tree ? But today such a thing had happened before the eyes of all. What could it point to but the collapse and ruin of all things (I underline). Then a god, finding himself powerless, might take flight in one final, backward glance at his abandoned worshippers cry :

If the cat cannot flee fast enough
Let him make way for the tortoise ! (3)

1 - Arrow of God, op. cit., p. 228.

2 - Idem, p. 229.

3 - Ibidem.

Ulu's behaviour is hard to explain despite he has showed some mercy toward his headstrong priest by sparing him the details of the Umuaro ruin. This mercy is morally questionable because Ezeulu ought to see what his stubbornness has brought upon Umuaro. It will be fairer. Divine justice must not be biased. Ezeulu is really responsible for his act because he did not care about Ulu's warnings. So he must go through an ordeal. Madness is too comfortable. He ought to suffer more in accordance with what he has done to Umuaro.

But this final act of malevolence proved merciful. It allowed Ezeulu, in his last days, to live in the haughty splendour of a demented high priest and spare him knowledge of the final outcome. (1)

For Umuaro people, Ulu has sided with them against his ambitious priest. By reasoning likewise they believe firmly that Ezeulu ruined himself in acting as he did. So they harvest "in the name of the son."²

The course of the events seems to give reason to Nwaka and his followers but it is a failure for both sides indeed. Ezeulu who symbolizes Umuaro unity, cohesion and solidarity stands aside against the whole community. The triumph of Nwaka however momentaneous it may be, is that of Idemili and the other rivals of Ezeulu. But the main winner is Winterbottom the British representative. The Igbo community life is disrupted due to its internal and external contradictions. The white presence is but a revealer of the society-weakness announcing its next collapse.

Their god had taken sides with them against his headstrong and ambitious priest and thus upheld the wisdom of their ancestors - that no man however great was greater than his people, that no one

1 - Arrow of God, op. cit., p. 229.

2 - Idem, p. 230.

ever won a judgement against his clan. (1)
Ezeulu's downfall has incalculable consequences on the next events. The Christian is gaining ground and the white man's institutions are widespread over Igboland.

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1 - Arrow of God, op. cit., p. 230.

P A R T T H R E E



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CHAPTER ONE

=====

THE DISRUPTIVE CONSEQUENCES OF THE
WHITE MAN'S INSTITUTIONS ON IGBOLAND

European colonialism had more than one way to carry out its mission in Africa. First of all it was based upon the so-called notion of the white man's superiority. The Europeans believed firmly that they were the most civilized men in the world. Thus they felt the need to civilize the black "savages". They used many means for that purpose. The Christian Church and the Army came after the explorers followed by the traders. Here we are interested in the white man's settlement on Igboland and the disruptive forces which they embodied. The first contact between the two worlds proved to be disastrous for the blacks. This painful encounter has visible consequences on Igbo every day life. The well-structured community-life has been shaken to its roots. The custom and law were questioned which had never happened before. The greatest representatives of the society were humiliated. Our two heroes epitomize this past : Okonkwo commits suicide and Ezeulu becomes mad. The white man's arrival in Africa is tragic for the African peoples in general.

L'invasion du continent noir par les Européens boucla l'ère de l'Afrique spécifiquement africaine. Le colonisateur imposa sa loi, sa culture (celle de l'Afrique) reçut un choc, et sa démographie vacilla. (1)

The white man's colonialism was a monster with many legs which were composed by the administration, the school, the army and the church. Each of them enabled it to gain ground gradually

1 - BONI (Nazi), Crépuscule des temps anciens, p. 16 et s. Présence Africaine, Paris. Cité par Claude Wauthier dans L'Afrique des Africains. Editions du Seuil, Collection L'Histoire immédiate, p. 60.

by using free-labour, compulsory collective works, natives, converts, and interpreters. Those who refused to work for the white man's were banished, severely punished or killed.

In Achebe's two novels the first contact with the white is decisive as for the future of the community. In Things Fall Apart the first white man appears when the main character is banished and is living at Mbanta his motherland where he has no important role to play. One of ~~his~~ clansmen Obierika and his friend brings him the bad news. The white man comes and settles on Igboland, more precisely in Umuofia. The Oracle had said so. He tells him the story of the destruction of Abam. The first contact with the white men is disastrous. The white men's power is so dangerous that they are assimilated to evil spirits. The natives who first meet them run away as if they ~~had~~ seen the devil in person. That event is tragi-comic. Most Africans had had the same reaction in the past. Igbo people too are afraid of the unknown but they are at the same time puzzled by it. The white has brought his way of life among ~~the Igbos who are~~ not yet quite ready to accept it.

Okonkwo sums up the situation accurately. The white man has come with his faith and soldiers. The Igbo must face two fights. The first one is spiritual and the second is physical. The new order represented by the church and its missionaries undertake a tremendous religious propaganda which helps to colonize the mind. Little by little the Christian faith gains some followers among the heathen natives. This new order makes the outcast be aware of their unjust lot. They rebel against the ancient order they belonged to. Two categories of people embrace

the Christian faith. The twins' mothers and the Osu. This is one internal factor which enables the Christians to step in and to spread their faith on Igboland threatening by that fact Igbo unity. This is possible because the twins are thrown in Evil Forest. This tradition hurts the mother's feeling. Motherhood is a solid link which is stronger than custom. Therefore the twins mothers reject the tradition that compels them to throw their offspring away and at the same time they reject the society based upon such custom. The Osu, like the twins are outcast. The Osu are deities slaves. Instead of being sacred for that fact, they are considered as cursed and live like pariahs.

The Osu and twins are two minor cracks within Igbo social structure. They refuse to acknowledge such injustice since the white man's church has settled on Igboland.

Meanwhile the Christians spread their faith by dint of persuasion. The Igbos try to counteract it but without success.

Thielo, the priestess of Agbala, called the converts the excrement of the clan and the new faith was a mad dog that had come to eat it up. (1)

Nwoye and Oduche who are supposed to inherit and perpetuate their respective community's values embrace the new faith despite their respective fathers' refusal and hostility. The Christians weaken Igbo self-confidence. They do hit the target, for when the mind is sick it is easy to enslave a man and make him deny or forget his own self.

In that respect, the church is unmatched in brain-washing. ^{the} Igbos are losing their heathen beliefs. When Nwoye

1 - Things Fall Apart, op. cit., p. 101.

embraces the Christian faith his father curses him. Family ties are broken and the administration succours the Christians, Division among the natives weakens them. The missionaries disparage the heathen religion and the natives are very critical about Christianity. The clash of the two communities is a religious one because religion has shaped human values from both sides. The natives refuse to share the Christian dogma about the Trinity because the white man's explanation is confusing : Okonkwo's question is relevant.

You told us with your own mouth that there was only one god. Now you talk about his son. He must have a wife, then. The crowd agreed.

Nwoye's intense inner life urges him to question the universe surrounding him. Contrary to his father, he wants to know the ultimate reason of the world. He is not a conformist like his father. Their conflict stems from there. It becomes more acute when the boy attends the Church. Okonkwo cannot accept such a behaviour. Nwoye is not alone in his fight for a more spiritual freedom. The Osu, the twin-mothers too have experienced the heavy pressure of social custom on their destinies. They are going to be freed from their anguish and anxiety. A new life of hope is opened before them. They cling to it like drowned men who catch a strong bough. The Osu are redeemed by the new faith which restores their human dignity. Before the advent of Church the Osu were secluded but now they have found a protector in the Church contrary to heathen natives.

They (the Osu) are regarded by the free-born with repugnance which is in part at least

physical and which is remarkable when one remembers that originally they were free-born themselves. (1)

Nwoye is attracted by the Christians' ceremonies, rituals, music, stories and mysteries. Only a sensitive soul, a delicate character can be upset by such things.

The Igbo fight against this religion because they perceive it as an impending threat to their survival. So they expect the deities to destroy the white church because the white man has trespassed their ancestral laws and must die for that ; but nothing happens. Consequently the Church gains some converts in the eyes of the community :

Not longer he (the white man) won his first three converts. (2)

Umuofia institutions start cracking due to the allegiance to the new faith in Things Fall Apart. The same phenomenon may be observed if we analyse Oduche's behaviour in Arrow of God. The only difference is that Ezeulu does send Oduche to the missionaries' school while Nwoye joins it after due thought. The main event is that a priest of traditional religion dare send his son to a new religion even if his motive is praiseworthy. This attitude is seen as Ezeulu's second major betrayal after the land dispute. Here too ^{the} Igbo_s are facing two threats.

The first one is internal. There is a fight between Ulu and Edemili which tells on their respective priests. This division within Umuaro while hostile forces are near is a danger. We can add to that the hero's stubbornness which is his tragic

1 - An Ibo Village Affairs, op. cit., p. 24.

2 - Things Fall Apart, op. cit., p. 106.

dimension. The heroes epitomize their societies. Therefore when Ezeulu refuses to be appointed king which the white man perceives as a challenge to his authority and power. This is an external threat to traditional power from the white.

Ezeulu's attitude can be explained by the fact that his community does not acknowledge kingship. Igbo society is a democratic one as far as ruling is concerned. A chain of reactions precipitate the clashes at three levels because there are three contradictions.

First Ezeulu is imprisoned because of his refusal to be appointed king.

Second he has to face his avowed enemies.

Third he has to carry out his will power against everybody. Here the "hubris" takes all its significance since Ezeulu is doomed to fight. All the tragic dimension of Ezeulu is revealed to us by the very obstacles he must face without forgetting the disruptive effect of the church. We will study some of its aspects and its disruptive effects on Igbo institutions. First of all the administration manifests itself by sending policemen to arrest Ezeulu. These policemen are Igbo but their discourse reveals that they are alienated. They have forgotten themselves as Igbo community members. They share the white man's values and help him to impose his laws.

Sometime na dim said his companion. But we nogo return back jus like dat. All this waka wey we waka come here no fit go for nating. (1) (sic)

Some blacks side with the white men against their own clansmen because of the new values. When in jail, Ezeulu feels this like a betrayal. After his release he confuses his friends and his foes by refusing to announce the new moon so that he may flog

his clansmen who have been ungrateful to him. The cracks are widening because of Ezeulu's attitude and by the same way he paves the way for the Christian Church to step in because he starves his fellowmen to death. They cannot stand it and send yams to the church which allows them to harvest.

In this confrontation, traditional religion has been belittled in the natives' eyes. Those who have trespassed the custom have not been punished by Idemili. The white man's power increases while Igbo community weakens. Even Nwaka yields to that obvious evidence.

As a result many people - some of them very important - began to send their children to school. Even Nwaka sent a son - the one who least likely among his children to become a good farmer. (1)

Before such chaotic events Goodcountry makes up his mind. He seizes the opportunity given to the natives by the next Festival yam to save Umuaro from a sure impending death. The catechist wants to save his heathen clansmen from "darkness" and death even if the cost is the ruin of the old order. Indeed Goodcountry seems very good for his countrymen.

This was God's hour to save them from their error which was now threatening to ruin them. They must be told that if they made their thank offering to God they could harvest their crops without fear of Ulu. (2)

Due to that event, Igbo deities' shrines are deserted because of the gods' inefficiency to face the white man's guns and bible. The administration has played a decisive role in the destruction of Igbo institutions based upon religious beliefs. Ezeulu, Nwaka, Ulu and Idemili have partaken in that ruin of religion. Those who must defend the old order are the first who bring confusion and disagreement. Therefore the clashes of the two worldviews will be fatal.

1 - Arrow of God, op. cit., p. 215.

2 - Ibidem.

CHAPTER TWO

CLASHES BETWEEN TWO WORLDVIEWS

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Many conflicts result from different worldviews. Now each community perceives itself as a distinct entity. This plural approach of values is possible because of religion which has shaped human society. Therefore any event that affects this institution has consequential effects on men's behaviour.

To protect their respective beliefs and values the colonizers and the natives who belong to different religions were then to fight to death for their survival. Here we witness a fight between a traditional agrarian Igbo society against a nascent industrial country belonging to the most developed western nations at that time.

First we will analyse traditional Igbo religion, second British modern religion and third the fatal clashes of the two worldviews and their consequences on Igbo values and behaviour.

As we have mentioned in a previous chapter, the Igbos are polytheists because one god cannot meet their demands and each deity is specialized for a well-defined need. Therefore different needs require different gods. The gods' existence follows a hierarchy. This faith in many gods is in accordance with Igbo spiritual universe and physical environment. This outlook has an overall impact on social structure. Igbo pyramidal community is composed - by order of importance - of the deities, the dead ancestors, the priests, the elders, the ordinary men and the outcast who contrary to the others can never reach the top of social Igbo ladder. Therefore Igbo

community is a closed society to a certain extent. However some free-born men, by dint of perseverance, manage to climb many rungs of the social ladder by taking titles according to their own merit. This possibility of social promotion within the community is denied to the Osu and the twins. Such a society cannot be reformed from the interior. To escape this social pressure the outcast have the Christian church as element of comparison. It embodies new values such as brotherhood and charity toward the marginal human beings within Igbo community. Western religion - as we will see - is not only that positive vision of the outcast. The church conveys a cultural legacy which buttresses foreign values contradicting Igbo wisdom. Consequently things are going to evolve because new values are not easy to accept for the ruling members of traditional society. The church dreams of martyrdom and repentance. To carry out this aim it uses spiritual violence towards the natives and physical violence too. The British administration helps the church with natives soldiers, policemen, carriers and interpreters under the order of District officers and Commissioners. The conversion of the Osu to the Christian faith and the upbringing of the twins by the missionaries are regarded as sacrilege. The free-born natives feel this deed as an offence to deities and dead ancestors. They rebel against this new order first peacefully and second violently when they can stand it no more.

How do these clashes of the two worldviews start ?

Traditions and customs die hard. The heroes' main role is to defend the values of his community since he epitomizes

its highest principles. The whites were to fight against them before the advent of the "Pax Britanica". As long as the Christians do not meddle with the native laws everything goes well. A "modus vivendi" is found despite the Christians' attitude towards the outcast.

It was true they were rescuing twins from the bush, but they never brought them into the village. (1)

This relative peace is broken by the converts who are making trouble due to their eagerness to spread the new faith on Igboland. The proselytes will not have a rest till they succeed in destroying the heathen's beliefs. According to the converts' new logic the heathen pollute the land since they are the Devil's children who delay the advent of the Saviour's kingdom. The converts ridicule the deities and their priests who are high ranking members of Igbo community.

The converts had gone into the village and boasted openly that all the gods were dead and impotent and they were prepared to defy them by burning all their shrines. (2)

Given all these circumstances rumours spread fast. The natives become more and more aware of the danger that the expansion of the new faith represents for the equilibrium of their pristine community. They question the missionaries' peaceful intention. They cannot watch them do what they like at the cost of the Igbos' survival as a homogenous ethnic group. Due to

1 - Things Fall Apart, op. cit., p. 110.

2 - Ibidem.

this tense relationship, suspicion and hostility become a general rule.

The whites come with their institutions and values which defy the Igbos' social structure and ancestral wisdom.

But stories were already gaining ground that the white man had not only brought a religion but also a government. It was said that they had built a place of judgement in Umuofia to protect the followers of their religion. It was even said that they had hanged one man who killed a missionary. (1)

Igbo laws condemn the killing of one's clansmen. This hampers their fight against the converts who are an actual threat to the clansmen's cohesion. The whites' powerful administration dissuades them from retaliating immediately. The Igbos contemplate driving them out of the clan. It will not be an easy task. The Christians intend to settle there forever. Their mission is to spread the Gospel willy-nilly.

Meanwhile the Osu are being converted and they become the more zealous converts. They even strifle a sacred python which is "the emanation of the god of the water"². Contrary to what one may expect the convert who carries out this abomination has not been outlawed or fined. The heathens find themselves in dilemma about what to do. As usual Mbanta people hold a meeting to settle this matter in dispute. Okonkwo proposes to whip the whites out of the village but he is not followed by the majority. People's opinions are set at variance. Finally they decide not to face the white man. They are divided.

1 - Things Fall Apart, op. cit., p. 110.

2 - Ibidem.

The assembly rejects the hard line position by an overwhelming majority. This teaches us a lesson of democracy among the free-born Igbo men. At the same time we know that Igbo society is a male dominated society since the major decisions are taken by men.

"But there were many others who saw the situation differently, and it was their counsel that prevailed in the end. "It was not our custom to fight for our gods" said one of them. "Let us not presume to do so now. If a man kills the sacred python in the secrecy of his hut the matter lies between him and the god. We did not see it." (1)

While the natives are waiting for their offended god to chastise the offender, the number of the converts is increasing from day to day. The religious hierarchy supports and encourages the young church contrary to the native priests who prefer to wait and see what will come next. The well-organized Christian church is working hard. It is more enterprising than the traditional religion because they have not the same conception about how to convey their respective values.

Men, women and children leave the heathens for the Christians and work for the church. They live in a harmonious community. The women do the female works while the men do the male ones for Christ's sake.

One day a group of young natives prevent the Christian native women from getting water from the river by whipping them. Then the converts decide to accompany their women to the river. They use weapons to protect them. The clansmen are ready to fight one another to defend their respective faith. The clashes become more violent and the unity of the clan is

1 - Things Fall Apart, op. cit., p. 113.

threatened. The cultural clashes become an impending danger. Of course the administration champions the church's cause. It sends its civil servants to impose Christian views and order. The clan is judged according to the new values. The natives who do not swear allegiance to the British Crown are outlawed on their fatherland by foreign laws. Their way to settle matters in dispute is wiped out and declared out-dated by force if need be. A man's house is no longer his castle with the new order. The natives are deprived of all power. At this very moment of confusion and chaos for the Igbos, Mr Brown a Christian priest decides to talk to the most important representatives of the clan. He tries to persuade them to embrace the Christian faith so that they may be saved from hellfire. He builds a missionary school where children will be sent. He enters each compound and asks to be given a child. The natives give him the slaves and the lazy boys. They send him those who are not showing signs of being future leaders or prominent members of Igbo community. This is a tactics of the Igbos who are hostile to the whites' institutions which are disrupting the social structure. Mr Brown understands this psychological behaviour. He holds a discourse about school and its usefulness in the future. According to him school is the key of the future. He believes in the advent of the western Christian church among the Igbos by a peaceful process.

He said that the leaders of the land in the future would be men and women who had learnt to read and write. If Umuofia failed to send her children to the school strangers would come from other places to rule them. They could already see that happening in the Native Court, where the D.C. was surrounded by strangers who spoke his tongue. (1)

Mr Brown's speech tells on the people's minds. The number of schools and churches has increased. Umuofia people are delighted by the visible effect of the new knowledge.

Even Okonkwo's own son Nwoye - now Isaac Okonkwo - is attending the college of teachers. School is an important means to alienate the natives. It helps the church to spread its dogma. What school fails to achieve, soldiers, policemen and prisons do. The pristine Igbo values are upside down now. Manliness is no longer held in praise. Okonkwo feels ill at ease since the world he used to live in is undergoing a metamorphosis.

Okonkwo was deeply grieved. And it was not just a personal grief. He mourned for the clan which he saw breaking up and falling apart, and he mourned the warlike men of Umuofia, who are so unaccountably become soft like women. (1)

When Mr Brown leaves Igboland the Reverend Smith replaces him. The two men have not the same way of dealing with the natives. Mr Smith's vision is clear cut. According to him there are two opposite forces : that of the chaos and darkness represented by the heathens and that of the cosmos and light embodied by the Christians. The Reverend sees religious life as a barracks-life. He rejects any compromise with the Igbos. He does not hesitate to convert people "manu militari". He condemns Mr Brown's method to spread Christian faith among the natives. He questions his teachings and is very critical about the native converts he finds in the congregation. In his opinion Mr Brown is very lenient as far as the Gospel truth is concerned.

Mr Brown had thought of nothing but numbers. He should have known that the kingdom of God did not depend on large crowd. (1)

Under Mr Smith's intransigence the converts become still more zealous and daring. Enoch a convert unmasks an egwugwu, a masked spirit, thus committing one of the greatest crime a man could commit. By so doing he has killed an ancestral spirit. All Umuofia is in confusion now. Each abomination has its specific way to be repaired. Therefore Enoch's offence cannot remain unpunished. The "Mother of the Spirit" walks around the village at night and requires revenge. As a retaliation the egwugwu destroy Enoch's compound and burn it down while he has been hidden by the Christians who fear to be killed. The church too must be burnt down despite The Reverend's attempt to prevent it by promising to settle the matter according to Christians laws. The egwugwu distrust him and refuse to listen to him. The answer is an epitome of the cultural clashes.

We cannot leave the matter in his hand because he does not understand our customs just as we do not understand his. We say he is foolish because he does not know our ways, and perhaps he says we are foolish because we do not know his. Let him go away. (2)

The egwugwu burn the church before Mr Smith. This clash will have many consequences afterwards on Umuofia. The same process of destruction^{of} native institutions can be observed in Umuaro too in Arrow of God.

Ezeulu's main concern is to understand the white man's customs. So he sends Oduche, his son to learn this very knowledge

1 - Things Fall Apart, op. cit., p. 130.

2 - Things Fall Apart, op. cit., p. 134.

that enables Winterbottom to be a victor in whatever he undertakes. Ezeulu admires the white man's know-how so he decides to spy on him. Meanwhile Winterbottom must appoint a warrant-chief since the Lieutenant Governor intends to impose Indirect Rule while he ignores Igbo customs. Winterbottom proposes this to Ezeulu who refuses because being the priest of Ulu is worthier than this promotion. His attitude is interpreted as an offence to British administration which decides to put Ezeulu in prison. A brief portrayal of some white characters will help us to understand the British conception of ruling the natives. There are roughly five whites living in Umuaro : Captain T. K. Winterbottom, the District Officer, Clarke his assistant a rather sympathetic character, Wade, Robert and Wright. Wade is in charge of the prison. Robert is the Assistant Superintendent of Police in charge of the local detachment". Mr Wright is in charge of the road building. He belongs to the Public Work Department supervising the new road to Umuaro. He is inclined to sleep with the native women and to beat the men. Of course Winterbottom reproves such act because he wants to keep the British blood pure. Here is the microcosm of the British subjects' universe in Igboland.

The natives perceive the road building as an opportunity for the whites to step into their whole local affairs once again. Umuaro people understand that the white man's road is a true threat to their customs and traditions.

At the very beginning the labour was paid to work on the road but now the work is compulsory. Wright uses hard labour because he wants to finish the road in due time. Roads are very important insofar as they play a paramount role for the traders and settlers. Wright seizes this occasion to use

Umuaro people as hard labour when he is short of money. The natives are complaining about this injustice but they are helpless since the white is the strongest. In a fit of temper they gather to see whether they will stop working or not. The interpreter makes them understand what this attitude implies and they keep quiet.

Moses told them that the white man would reply by taking their leaders to prison at Okperi. (1)

Umuaro people's situation is awkward. They cannot rebel against the new order which is destroying their customs. They are aware that the life and death struggle between the new order and the old one is unavoidable. The administration uses strong-arm tactics to provide for emergencies. Ezeulu uses a flawless argument to dissuade his fellowmen from fighting against the white men, for this will be suicidal.

I have travelled in Olu and I have travelled in Igbo I can tell you there is no escape from the white man. (...) As daylight chases away darkness so will the white man drive away our customs. (2)

Ezeulu's realism is pathetic but it limits his tragic dimension. His tragedy is that Ezeulu has a quick insight but he is a powerless witness of the ruin of his ancestral values. He deserves our compassion to a certain extent. Umuaro people are doomed to fail in whatever they undertake against the new order.

In Things Fall Apart as well as in Arrow of God the old order is cracking everywhere because of its internal and external contradictions. There are many conflicts and as many rivulets make a river the manifold conflicts were to make Igbo society collapse at the end.

1 - Arrow of God, op. cit., p. 84.

2 - Ibidem, p. 84.

CHAPTER THREE

THE COLLAPSE OF IGBO TRADITIONAL SOCIETY

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Christian church based on spiritual **strength** uses the administration to impose its values if need be. It often forces the natives to embrace Christianity instead of convincing them. As a result the heathen and the Christians were to encounter. As a weapon the British settlers have guns and the bible. Traditional Igbo society believes in its deities and medicine men. The western world at that time was more materialistic than the Igbo community. Thus the first one proposes or imposes his own values by many means.

Material wealth embodied by money enters Igboland. Some natives welcome this new order. John Nwodika, Winterbottom's cook, the court messengers, the interpreters, the policemen, the converts and the outcasts who are full-blooded Igbo advocate the white men's way of life. They prefer the coins to the cowries as a means of **exchange** in trade. Money becomes a means of corruption too. Where it fails the whites use violence. There are two sorts of corruption : the physical one and the spiritual one. Both are used to convince the rebellious natives. The Europeans give them food and clothes or beat and imprison them. Before such methods the natives are divided. Some people like Okonkwo want to defy the new order; the others like Ezeulu favour a *modus vivendi*.

These two conceptions divide Umuofia and Umuaro which are weakened. The outcasts rejoin the church. The free-born men are between the devil and the deep sea. From day to day the white man's supremacy prevails over the land. People are losing their cultural identity and freedom of cult. They no longer attend the deities' shrines. They embrace the new religion and take Christian names. They wear white men's clothes and

speak more or less accurately their tongue which is a sign of promotion through the new order. The Igbo become more and more alienated. They are forgetting their own selves. It is in this characteristic background that Okonkwo and Ezeulu are struggling to save Igbo values. Both are the spokesmen of their respective community to a certain extent. After many changes of fortune Okonkwo is back from Mbanta, his mother's village where he had been exiled due to his killing of a clansman. He has a bone to pick with the church because his elder son Nwoye who is supposed to see to his shrine when he dies has joined the Christians. Okonkwo feels this as a personal offence, a betrayal. Therefore he is impatient to come to grips with the new order. He takes part in the burning of the church which follows the dispute about the river and the unmasking of an egwugwu by Enoch. To settle the issue the District Commissioner invites six men from Umuaro. Okonkwo is among them. The natives suspect nothing. They fall in the trap headlong. The District Commissioner makes them handcuffed and put in the guardroom.

We shall not do you any harm said the District Commissioner to them later if only you agree to co-operate with us. We have brought a peaceful administration to you and your people so that you may be happy. If any man ill-treats you we will come to your rescue. But we will not allow you to ill-treat others. (1)

The District Commissioner's attitude is both paternalistic and machiavellian. The six men are jailed till their clansmen pay a fine which amounts to two hundred bags of cowries. The prisoners are released as soon as the sum is collected. This moral and physical torture brings their nerves down. They have an individual inner debate. They weigh the pros and the cons of

1 - Things Fall Apart, op. cit., p. 137.

fighting against the new order. Only Okonkwo does not give up fighting. He cannot accept the "Agbala's" arrogance. The native civil servants have betrayed their clansmen. They even beat them despite the District Commissioner's orders. Their wickedness is baffling.

Even when the men were left alone they found no words to speak to one another. It was only on the third day when they could no longer bear the hunger and the insults, that they began to talk about giving in.

'We could have killed the white man if you had listened to me'.

Okonkwo **snarled**.

'We could have been in Umuru now waiting to be hanged' someone said to him. (1)

Unfortunately for them one of the messengers overhear , their talking and comes to beat them rashly. The native civil servants need to defend the white man because they want to be promoted or rewarded consequently. The notion of solidarity which was so valuable among clansmen seems to be outdated. The civil servants have a particular status. They stand between the whites and the Igbos. They are not fully accepted by the whites with whom they side against the natives who reject them. The native civil servants are very wicked towards unsubmitive Igbos. The court messenger in charge of collecting the fine gives his own version of things. He asks more bags of cowries than he has been told by the District Commissioner. He takes advantage of the situation by telling them that the six men are going to be hanged if they do not pay the fine at once. The civil servants are corrupt to the bone.

Unless you pay the fine immediately said their headman we will take your leaders to Umuru

before the big white man and hang them. (1)

When the villagers learn this news they are panic-stricken. It is rumoured that the six men have been already hanged, that their families too will be hanged and that even the soldiers are walking towards Umuofia to repeat the same onslaught of Abame. The villagers hide themselves. It is as if there were no living soul in Umuofia a former village of heroic warriors feared by other villages. The Igbos are aware of their weakness before the strangers. Therefore they agree to submit and accept the white man's conditions to release the six native men.

On the morning after the village crier's appeal, the men of Umuofia met in the market place and decided to collect without delay two hundred and fifty bags of cowries to appease the white man. They did not know that fifty bags would go to the court messengers who had increased the fine for that purpose. (2)

Consequently the six representatives are released. They return home crestfallen. In so doing the administration levels everybody down. It punishes any rebellion or manifestation of freedom.

Okonkwo almost undergoes a nervous breakdown. His universe is wiped out by a hostile and stronger new one. The hero cannot accept that. When the public crier calls for a second meeting Okonkwo has already made up his mind. If the villagers do not follow him he will carry it out alone without flinching since he cannot live in dishonour. This can be explained by the fact that Okonkwo is imbued with lofty

1 - Things Fall Apart, op. cit., p. 138.

2 - Ibid., p. 139.

principles . He was born in a traditional society where the sense of dignity is the most prized value. Therefore an underserving man cannot live in such^a society. Igbo ethic is composed of the greatest sense of honour. This sense of dignity is a tragic one as far as Okonkwo is concerned. He has many common points with Pierre Corneille's heroes, mainly Rodrigue in Le Cid.

Okonkwo gives due thought to all the events that had happened since his return from exile. No place is left now for him. He decides to kill the representative of the new order or his messenger because he can neither forget nor forgive. He rejects the common consent as a betrayal of ancestral values. Only death is the remedy to his dilemma. Such is his conclusion.

The villagers are holding a meeting when the head messenger tells them to stop. The natives are deprived of their right to hold a meeting without a permission from the administration.

- The spell was broken by the head messenger.
Let me pass ! he ordered.
- What do you want here ?
The white man whose power you know too well
has ordered the meeting to stop.

In a fit of anger Okonkwo beheads the messenger without much ado. Instead of supporting Okonkwo's daring example Umuofia people disapprove his act. Frightened, the crowd breaks up. People blame him. Okonkwo' feels this attitude as a second betrayal. As a result of Okonkwo's deed the District Commissioner comes with his soldiers and interpreters to arrest the hero. Under the threat of the soldiers, Obierika - Okonkwo's friend - shows them the tree where Okonkwo has hanged himself. The District Commissioner considers this tragic death as just a

detail which is worth a little paragraph in a book he intends to write : The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of The Lower Niger. This title has pejorative connotations. It shows how the whites despise native culture termed as primitive. This so-called pacification has shed so much blood. This way to impose the "Pax Britannica" cost many lives among the natives. And the whites dare speak of humanism and civilization.

Obierika pays a moving tribute to the late Okonkwo.

That man was one of the greatest men in Umuofia.
You drove him to kill himself ; and now he will
be buried like a dog... (1)

Okonkwo's death is that of Umuofia too. Those who outlive the hero are not better than he since "the survival of the fittest" is not necessarily the survival of the best. After Okonkwo - a martyr to a cause - let us analyse Ezeulu's evolution.

As a priest of Ulu he is responsible for the destiny of his community. This is not an easy task since he has many foes within Umuaro. Being chosen *from* the weakest clan, he must be careful enough. This choice has been dictated to his fellow-men by their concerns to check and balance the power of the individuals mainly those who are in charge of regulating social life. The spiritual power is not unquestionable because it is not hereditary. This way of choosing a priest is an evidence of the democratic aspect of Igbo social structure where major decisions must be taken after a common consent of the natives who have the right "to vote" so to speak as our modern society does. This traditional society is well organized despite some flaws

inherent in any human institution. However this democratic choice does not avoid jealousy.

Nwaka a wealthy man and Idemili's priest are jealous of Ezeulu because he has been chosen from the weakest clan. He is a candidate of compromise. Despite this handicap, Ezeulu's temper gives him a special status within the community. He is endowed with good and bad qualities. His enemies are waiting his slightest mistakes to deprive him of his social prerogatives. This animosity becomes a threat to the balance of the community. Ezedimili manipulates Nwaka against Ezeulu. This religious dissension divides Umuaro into two rival gangs. Ezeulu acts as the impulse takes him. People interpret this behaviour as a defiance. This brings many conflicts within Umuaro. First he is denied the right to be priest by his half-brother Okeke Onenyi.

Second Umuaro people accuse him of betrayal during the land-dispute. This division enables Winterbottom to step in and give the land to Okperi, Ezeulu's mother village. Ezeulu interprets Winterbottom decision as a personal success because the white man has given him right against the whole of Umuaro. By so doing the priest is sawing off the branch on which he is sitting. The facts begin to pile up against Ezeulu who is closer to the colonist than his clansmen. The colonist takes advantage of this situation. He divides to rule, stirs up hatred and internal conflicts to disrupt the harmony and the cohesion of the ethnic group.

The priest befriends Winterbottom and takes this opportunity to send Oduche to the missionary school. He wants the boy to learn the white man's wisdom. He is misunderstood again. People cannot conceive that a chief priest sends his son to a

foreign and hostile religion. To them this is a betrayal even a social blunder. Instead of spying ^{on} the whites for his father Oduche embraces Christian faith. He commits an abomination by attempting to stifle the sacred python which is Idemili's emanation. Oduche's behaviour upsets Umuaro. All these events isolate Ezeulu from his community.

Meanwhile Winterbottom invites him and proposes him to be a warrant chief. The priest refuses and is jailed. This delays the performing of his religious rituals which consists in eating sacred yams to count the days of the new moon. When released he contemplates punishing Umuaro because his clansmen did not show enough compassion to their priest. He refuses to announce the new year which suspends the time of sowing and harvesting. He refuses to give in despite his six assistants' and the ten elders' pressure.

He uses his religious power to whip Umuaro. Since he is half-man half-spirit nobody can know which part prevails at a given moment. People are taken aback. They are locked in the past year. To carry out his revenge against his clansmen who do not espouse his cause and even his family and relatives, Ezeulu starves them. He justifies this deed by Ulu's will to use him as an arrow against his clansmen. Such logic is surprising from a chief priest who is supposed to help people.

At this critical period Obika is asked to complete the ritual of the spirit of the night which consists in running at night from village to village. This is performed only by the fastest young man of the community. He was ill but he could not refuse for fear that people should say he is acting like his father. While running he dies mysteriously. When Ezeulu sees the

body he becomes mad. Umuaro gives his yams to the church which allows them to harvest in the name of the son. Ezeulu's madness is interpreted as Ulu's punishment. The deity has abandoned his chief priest to his enemies. This madness is the death of Igbo spiritual values. Therefore the deities' shrines are deserted.

Their god had taken side with them against his headstrong and ambitious priest and thus upheld the wisdom of their ancestors - that no man however great was greater than his people ; that no one ever won a judgement against his clan. (1)

Ezeulu's death is a spiritual one while Okonkwo's is both spiritual and physical. Their death foretells the collapse of Igbo society because a society without saints or heroes is doomed to perish. Ezeulu is a prophet-like figure while Okonkwo is a hero and heroes never die despite their mistakes inherent in any human being made of flesh and bone.

How many Okonkwo and Ezeulu have died unknown ?

The colonist has managed to take advantage of the internal divergences to strengthen his own power. He occupies the land and spreads his way of life. He has pacified the Igbo country by dint of threat and corruption which give birth to submission and passivity. The natives partake in the ruin of their culture. They are alienated and enslaved. Their downfall is unavoidable.

1 - Arrow of God, op. cit., p. 230.

C O N C L U S I O N

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Ezeulu and Okonkwo have failed before the white men. We may ask what is Achebe's aim when he destroys his heroes at the end of these novels. The writer's pessimism is not gratuitous. It depicts what has actually happened as far as Igbo community is concerned and even African traditional society.

This gloomy setting may be explained by man's original sin. Religion teaches us that we all sinned in Adam's sin. The sons inherited the father's sins. All human beings are imperfect. Achebe's two heroes are not excepted. They experience success, failure, madness and death. This is man's lot. The imperfection of human nature tells on the institutions. Igbo community and the white man's administration embody vice and virtue. The factual level teaches us that different cultures may have different values which can be a ground for conflicts.

The Igbos' strength is based upon cohesion and unity at the social level. The individual lives in and for the community which protects him against external threat as far as he behaves consequently. The main values are manliness, submission to the collective custom and faith in the native deities. The Igbos do acknowledge some universal values such as justice and happiness. However weaknesses can be found here and there. The Osu and the twins are oppressed and rejected because of Igbo social norm about human hierarchy. This specific outlook hinders the cohesion and unity of the Igbos as a solidary group. This is a possible crack when they confront enemies mainly the Christians.

The Church is a means of salvation for the pariahs. All oppressed people embrace the new faith. The Church uses corruption, spiritual or physical violence, conviction and threat if need be to spread Christian faith among the natives who are leaving their gods. Oduche and Nwoye are among the pioneers of the new faith. The young people who are supposed to replace the elders are deserting the heathen deities. This is one more step toward alienation and ruin as far as the natives' culture is concerned.

The junction of the internal disruptive factors and the external ones makes the clash and collapse unavoidable. The white man wants to win while the natives' must survive. The two worldviews are irreconcilable. The one which will survive will not be necessarily the best, but the fittest in terms of scientific and technical achievements. Here we have the two aspects of science : the negative one and the positive one. Science is used to crash down man and his values or to help him to triumph over his enemies. That is why somewhere Winterbottom has defeated Ezeulu.

What does this teach us ? First of all, values are relative. The notions of good and evil can vary according to cultures. The Igbos and the white men's values have common points such as religion and justice but they do not have the same understanding about the individual and the community link.

Evil and good co-exist among the natives and the settlers. The white man's attempt to impose his own values and vision brings conflict and ruin among the Igbos.

Achebe uses fiction to dig deeper into his ancestral past. His purpose is to seize the gist of the matter. He tries to explain objectively why the Igbos fail before the white men. According to Achebe, our past was not so pure as some people want to make us believe so as to declare that the white man is the only culprit. Some African rituals do require human sacrifice. Betrayal, crime and greed do not belong exclusively to the white men. Of course our past was not stainless. Eros and Thanatos co-exist everywhere.

Achebe's main concern is how people manage to reconcile them since we are not saint-like figures. Man must live in equilibrium between chaos and cosmos. After this fight to death between the two communities, Achebe - the teacher - finds out that Africans, embodied by the Igbos, have lost confidence in themselves. Here fiction joins reality because the writer uses literature as therapeutics to heal the spiritual wounds that follow the confrontation consequences.

The Igbos have been defeated but the sense of their fight to secure their cultural legacy is still alive among many nations be it African or not. Traditional Igbo society has struggled to survive in a hostile environment worsened by the white men's arrival in Igboland.

The habits of thinking die-hard. The clash will be more deadly for it. The Igbos cannot see by themselves, what is wrong in their own community so as to find a remedy. They are convinced that everything follows its natural process. Some individuals happen to be critical but they never go beyond because social Igbo structure has its own limits. All these

factors put together will ruin the Igbos for the happiness of the white men who look forward dismantling it. There is some lack of cohesion in the apparent cohesion of Igbo social structure. The white men's arrival reveals it at the first conflict about the Osu and twins' place in society.

The metamorphoses of Igbo society mean the death of meritocracy. Ezeulu and Okonkwo are martyrs to a cause. They epitomize Igbo values despite their defects and failure.

Achebe is a realistic and pessimistic witness. Okonkwo undergoes a physical death while Ezeulu undergoes a spiritual one. Both stand for African historical heroes who fought against the colonists. The writer's approach espouses the tragic dimension of African history when in touch with colonialism. Achebe is not partial in his analysis. He is not a doctrinaire. The reader is free to choose but nothing is taken for granted. Achebe's point of view is well-balanced. Let us quote him again.

Let us give the devil his due ; colonialism in Africa disrupted many things, but it did create big political units where there were small scattered ones before (...). Of course there are areas where colonialism divided a single ethnic group among two or three powers. But on the whole it did bring together many peoples that had hitherto gone their several ways. (1)

Achebe's wise attitude explains why in his fiction the two heroes have been treated differently. Ezeulu who favours a modus vivendi with the new order will survive despite his madness while Okonkwo the daring warrior will be compelled to commit suicide. The white men's presence is not an absolute evil.

1 - KILLAM (G. D.), op. cit., p. 4.

The two heroes' failure may be fruitful if it enables us to take advantage of our weaknesses and defects in order to correct them. Colonialism has positive and negative aspects. It is a mixture of good and evil. By dealing with this human adventure Achebe raises the universal issue of ethics which everyman has to face everywhere.

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