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| RESEARCH ARTICLE

## Confusion, Misjudgment and Dissonance: The Fall of a Priest, a People and a God in Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God*

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| ABSTRACT

Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God* portrays the gradual downfall and the ultimate doom of the protagonist, Ezeulu, of the entire Igbo community and even their deity, Ulu. Ezeulu's tragedy happens in numerous stages influenced by various factors stemming from personal, communal and religious conflicts and his misinterpretation or misunderstanding of himself, his people, his deity and institutions and circumstances. Set in the 1920s Nigeria, *Arrow of God* portrays a period when colonial machination is well underway, and the native beliefs and institutions are crumbling under its grueling pressure. This paper seeks to show how *Arrow of God* shows that the main reason for the debacle of Igbo society lies in their internal conflicts, failure to stick to their tradition and the helplessness and dilemma to which colonialism has subjected them. Achebe asserts that for the sake of maintaining age-old traditions, some flexibility in judgment must be there, and any kind of absolutism should be avoided for the greater interest of the people.

| KEYWORDS

Disintegration, disunity, doom, flexibility, revenge

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### 1. Introduction

Chinua Achebe has always been an avid champion of African culture and heritage, seeking to uphold the depth, potency and *assertability* of African culture and tradition through his writings. He is especially critical of the European claim that African people have no culture and can only be civilized through European intervention. According to Achebe, African history "with all its imperfection was not one long night of savagery from which the Europeans acting on God's behalf delivered them" (Achebe, 1965, p. 162). Achebe's writings show how, through cultural invasion, Europeans at first created cracks in African culture and tradition, which ultimately led to disintegration and indignity for African people. Achebe attributes the success of the European cultural invasion to this disunity resulting from ignorance and confusion among Africans caused by colonialism. Certainly, he is not dreaming of going back to the pre-colonial Africa and starting things anew, but he feels that it is his duty to make Africans aware of what was at the root of their loss of dignity to Europeans:

The worst thing that can happen to any person 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 (Achebe, 1964b, p. 159).

*Arrow of God* shows Achebe's unwavering faith in Igbo culture and tradition, his emphasis on unity in the community and how he regrets the absence of such unity. He seeks to show how the crumbling of unity among African people facilitates the hijacking of their culture, tradition and dignity.

## 2. Literature Review

Chinua Achebe's essay, "The Role of a Writer in a New Nation" (1964), explores the role of a writer in regaining the lost dignity of a nation.

Another essay by Achebe entitled "The Novelist as a Teacher" (1965) asserts that African society did not depend on Europeans as a civilizing force to save them from savagery.

Yet the essay of Achebe, "Chi in Igbo Cosmology" (2014), deals in detail with the role and importance of Chi, an individual's personal god, in Igbo society.

A.F.M. Maswood Akhter's article, "Home and Diaspora in Literary Contexts: A Brief Discourse on Relevant Issues" (2012), interestingly claims that culture is a way for a people to distinguish themselves from others.

Blaise N. Mac Hila's article entitled "Ambiguity in Achebe's *Arrow of God*" (1981) discusses the pivotal position of Ezeulu in the society portrayed in *Arrow of God*.

Ihechukwu Madubuike's article, "Achebe's Ideas on Literature" (1974), discusses the catastrophic indication of the death of Ezeulu's son in *Arrow of God*.

Owen G. Mordaunt's article entitled "Conflict and Its Manifestation in Achebe's *Arrow of God*" (1989) discusses the internal and external conflicts that Ezeulu faces.

## 3. Methodology

This is a qualitative research work based on close textual exegesis. The text of *Arrow of God* has been analysed, and relevant research works have been consulted.

Chinua Achebe's essay, "Chi in Igbo Cosmology", has been consulted and referred to in order to make clear the issue of Achebe's attitude towards individualism and absolutism vis-à-vis communal unity.

The presentation of conflicts and disintegration at various levels, such as personal, social, and political, shown in *Arrow of God*, has been explored.

The comparative presentation of the African and European communities in *Arrow of God* has been explored to analyse the fall of the African community against the stability of the European community shown in the novel.

The article draws a conclusion about Achebe's emphasis on the significance and the dignity of communal unity in the context of Igbo or African culture.

## 4. Discussion

African culture and traditions, as shown by Achebe, can be considered almost synonymous with "unity". During the pre-colonial period, this culture held them together. By gradually destroying or undermining this culture, Europeans insinuated themselves into their society, instigated conflicts among them, and then tore their unity apart. When the Lieutenant Governor in *Arrow of God* endorses "indirect rule" to establish their rule over native cultural constructs to facilitate their control over natives, he is just devising a way to subtly insert into Africa European culture, which will gradually decay and destroy the native culture causing the African tradition and unity to give way to the European supremacy. According to Maswood Akhter, culture "is an attempt towards summarising the ways in which groups distinguish themselves from other groups, representing what is shared within it, and simultaneously what is not shared outside it" (Akhter, 2012, p. 59). Culture and tradition hold the potency of a nation or a community and keep the community tied together as its roots. Therefore, culture and tradition cannot be distinguished from unity or the fellow feeling existing in a community. *Arrow of God* attributes the fall of African dignity to the disintegration and dissonance existing at personal, familial and social levels.

The novel starts with the central character, Ezeulu, sitting in his house looking for the new moon. As the rotation of months of the Igbo year depends on the arrival of the moon and the count of the months are of central importance in their life as their agriculture depends on it, the theme of culture and tradition is established at the very beginning. The theme becomes more vivid as Ezeulu, the Chief Priest who has to perform many traditional roles such as keeping the count of the moon declaring certain festivals of vital importance, is said to start looking for the moon three days before its arrival. A close look at Ezeulu's household shows that the house of the Chief Priest structurally symbolizes tradition:

His Obi was built differently from other men's huts. There was the usual long threshold in front but also a shorter one on the right as you entered. The eaves on this additional entrance were cut back so that sitting on the floor, Ezeulu could watch that part of the sky where the moon had its door (Achebe, 1964a, p 1).

There is a special arrangement in the house to see the moon and, as the house of the Chief Priest, it is the centre of religion also. Right after sighting the moon, Ezeulu goes to check how many yams are left because, after he has eaten the remaining yams, he will have to declare the New Yam Feast, which proclaims the beginning of a new year, and this festival is of vital importance to them. So Ezeulu's house is supposed to be the hub of culture and tradition, and any kind of conflict or contention in this house also symbolizes disunity and conflict within the entire community. Inside this house, Ezeulu's jealous wives are often seen to get involved in bickering. His head wife, Matefi and her daughter, Ojiugo, do not like his partiality towards his youngest son, Nwafo, who was borne to another wife of his. Thus there are signs of cracks in relationships in the very house of the Chief Priest. It is very normal in African society to see the wives of a man being jealous of each other and his children from different wives not being on good terms with each other, but the condition in Ezeulu's house is the embryonic symbolization of the debacle of African unity and tradition that the latter part of the novel portrays. The fact is made clear when later in the novel, Ezeulu's community has abandoned him, and he sees in a vision that his house is empty and his family members are missing. Owen G. Mordaunt notes:

The cultural clash, the domestic contention, and other problems and forces serve to externalize the conflict, which is gnawing at the Chief Priest's innermost being. His household is divided; his sons no longer show the traditional respect due to a father, and his wives are at loggerheads with one another. Oduche has become the source of division, as well as Nwafo, the favourite son whom Ezeulu assumes will be Ulu's chosen successor to the priesthood. Ezeulu's impotence at restoring order to his own household suggests an inability at unifying the people of Umuaro and Okperi (Mordaunt, 1989, p. 158).

Ezeulu fails to gain the respect from his sons that an African father traditionally expects from his sons— tradition is under threat in the Chief Priest's own house. Edogo, his eldest son, occasionally argues with him and suspects his motif behind sending his another son, Oduche, to Europeans as his representative. Oduche himself fails Ezeulu by failing to be his representative among Europeans. Something ominous happening inside Ezeulu's household is waiting to be magnified into an all-destroying blow to Igbo life and tradition.

Before pointing out the conflicts among the members of Ezeulu's family, Achebe at first shows the conflict in Ezeulu's own mind— a conflict between how he actually holds power over his people as the Chief Priest and how he wants to enjoy the power. Ezeulu has been shown as an overconfident power-hungry man as the Chief Priest always looks for ways to assert his position. He refuses to accept the fact that with age, his eyesight has weakened and considers himself to be stronger than the youths of the present time. While shaking hands with young people, he likes to grip their hands tightly and make them wince in pain. Alone, Ezeulu considers the extent of his power— though he is proud to think that he is endowed with the responsibility to declare the days for the New Yam Feast and the festival of the Pumpkin Leaves, he is unhappy with the fact that it is not he who chooses the days. He thinks that his duty is merely that of "a watchman". Here starts the conflict. Ezeulu wants to be more than a watchman and demands greater power. As he considers whether or not he can refuse to declare the dates for the grand events and comes to the conclusion that he cannot dare to, he is "stung to anger by this as though his enemy [has] spoken it" (Achebe, 1964a, p. 4). A voice within him snaps: "Take away that word dare, ... No man in all Umuaro can stand up and say that I dare not. The woman who will bear the man who will say it has not yet been born" (p. 4). The ambit Chief Priest's power is defined by religion and customs, and the Priest must show respect for that. But Ezeulu's reacting to this as he would to his "enemy" proves that he harbours subversion in his heart of his own traditions and people as he thinks that even they cannot say that he has no power to withhold the dates for the events. This can easily lead to conflicts between him and his community or his deity, as the supreme system of religion is being flouted, and Ezeulu is demanding more power than is allowed him. This also shows that Ezeulu has problems accepting or understanding his position in the complex matrix of African society, which endangers his ability to take the right decisions during the crisis that colonialism brings.

After showing conflicts and confusion at personal and familial levels, the novel soon portrays the conflicts existing in the entire community. Though Umuaro is made up of six villages that came together to form a confederacy to save themselves from the warriors of Abam, the threads of that unity has now started to fray and embers of dissension and division lie underneath. The most obvious sign of conflict in Umuaro is that between Ezeulu, who is from Umuachala, and Nwaka, from Umunneora, the largest village. These two people get involved in the political battle to influence the people of Umuaro in their favour. While Ezeulu tries to convince the people that they must not go into war with Okperi over the disputed piece of the land, Nwaka opposes him and tries to justify war. When Ezeulu says that Mr. Winterbottom, the British officer, wants to meet him in the village gathering, Nwaka

angrily says that Ezeulu should go to meet him as the white man is his friend without considering the fact that Ezeulu has already refused to meet him. Nwaka even complains that it is because of the jealousy among the big villages that priesthood was given to the weakest. Obviously, Nwaka is not happy that the Chief Priest should be from a small village while there are bigger villages. Besides, the jealousy and sour relation between Ezeulu and Ezidemili, the priest of Idemili, shows how even people of religious importance in the community are divided over petty things while a formidable power like colonialism is gradually tightening its grip on them. Now, it is not abnormal that there should be arguments and disagreements in the meetings of Igbo elders. They discuss and argue about their problems in such meetings. The point is that whenever they meet in order to discuss a problem caused by colonialism, they end up in confusion and indecision. In Achebe's other novel, *Things Fall Apart*, we see Igbo village gatherings successfully discussing and resolving social and legal issues, but in *Arrow of God*, such gatherings fail pathetically, and no consensus is ever seen to be reached because colonialism has struck the community at its roots and the very foundation on which it stands is badly shaken. That is why when the village elders gather to discuss whether they should work to construct "the white man's road", Nweke Ukpaka helplessly but emphatically declares that even though many of them want to fight Europeans, they are too weak for that. One reason that he shows is their ignorance of the white man: "What a man does not know is greater than he" (p. 105). It is difficult for Igbo people who have always lived in a small ghetto unaware of Europeans' sophisticated weapons and diplomacy to understand the nature of Europeans' way to fight and confronting them. So it is not surprising that Igbo people are confused about how to deal with Europeans. But Ukpaka's speech points out something more sinister—the disunity that their community is already experiencing: "the very house he [the white man] has been seeking ways of pulling down has caught fire of its own will" (p. 105). This comment of Ukpaka shows that their community is already divided and confused, and all that Europeans need to do is just to pull the loose parts apart to establish their rule there. If the Igbo community in *Arrow of God* is compared to the British officers in the novel living in Africa as another community, it is seen that both the communities have cases of serious conflicts among them. For example, Captain Winterbottom is bitterly critical of the policy of promotion in the British army in Africa and disagrees with many of the decisions of his superiors. But the British officers' efficacy remains impervious to such conflicts as they are professional and belong to a well-trained force. Unlike them, the dissension and disunity among Igbo people leave them weak, confused and divided against colonial aggression. At the end of the novel, both Ezeulu and Winterbottom are unhappy with the hierarchy of which they are parts (Ezeulu is inferior to Ulu and Winterbottom is inferior to his superior officers), but it is Ezeulu that loses everything, including his sanity, but Winterbottom returns to Africa after a recuperative leave, gets married, which indicates settlement, and resumes his duty as part of the regime. While Winterbottom remains united with his community despite personal grudges, Ezeulu is thrown out of his community, and the community is thrown out of its dignified position. This proves Winterbottom's statement that the Igbo have not developed any "central authority" (p. 44). This is one very powerful cause behind the disintegration of their community. How can a people who solve their problems by discussing them in village gatherings without any established body to be considered as the authority deal with a mighty, experienced and shrewd regime? They do have a fixed hierarchy of positions ranging from Ulu himself through dignitaries of various categories to the ordinary people, but this becomes ineffective in front of the giant colonial enterprise.

Ezeulu's downfall can be, to a considerable extent, attributed to his misjudgment of himself; his God, Ulu; his people and the colonial power. This misinterpretation or misunderstanding leads him to take several drastic steps against his own community and thus face the ultimate doom along with the entire community. His first mistake is his narcissistic overestimation of himself and his position as the Chief Priest, which leads him to ignore several facts about himself and his community. To a great extent, he is blinded by this overestimation, which is one reason he often ignores his clan, which leaves him stranded at the end of the novel. His attitude towards life is authoritarian. He likes to treat his grown-up sons as little children and cannot tolerate their disobedience. He is often seen chiding his children for disobeying him. He sends Oduche to Europeans as his "eye", ignoring Oduche's mother, Ugoye's objection. Edogo's deceased mother said about Ezeulu:

Ezeulu's only fault was that he expected everyone — his wives, his kinsmen, his children, his friends and even his enemies — to think and act like himself. Anyone who dared to say no to him was an enemy. He forgot the saying of the elders that if a man seeking a companion who acted entirely like himself, he would live in solitude (p. 114).

She was right about his nature. He wants to take all his decisions alone. When the white man's messenger, Jekopu, comes to inform him of Mr. Winterbottom's summons, he is determined not to go. But soon after that, when Nwaka speaks angrily about his friendship with the white man, he instantly decides to go without considering the implications or outcome of his going to Okperi, the rival village. This shows that Ezeulu has the habit of acting whimsically and taking rash decisions. He does it as an act of protest only because he has been taunted by Nwaka but can he himself justify how this functions as a sort of protest? He is often seen quoting various sayings of Igbo ancestors, but himself forgets the saying that Edogo's mother talked about and is accordingly left "in solitude". More than once, Ezeulu is seen to say that a father never lies to his son, meaning that he has faith in what his ancestor used to say. Then why did he forget such an important saying of them? He must have some problem understanding or following the very principles that he believes in. While talking to Akuebue about going into war with Okperi over the disputed land, he tells

him that "when two brothers fight a stranger reaps their harvest" (p. 162), but he easily accepts Winterbottom as his friend just because he has supported his stance in the land dispute while maintaining his conflicts with Ezidemili. He talks about the dangerous outcome of the conflict within the two villages but does not see the implication of Winterbottom's snatching guns from them and then destroying them. Naïve Ezeulu fails to realize that Winterbottom has not snatched the guns only to let the two villages involved in the dispute live in peace, but he has symbolically made them vulnerable and impotent. He regrets the internal division among his people, but when it comes to his conflict with Ezidemili, both the priests act like jealous children, and no reconciliation seems possible between them.

The worst mistake that Ezeulu commits is refusing to declare the date for the New Yam Feast following his imprisonment in Okperi and his later release. He goes to Okperi on his own accord, acting rashly on a whim but blames his community for his plight during the imprisonment. Whatever his relationship with his clan is, Ezeulu is certainly a man of high importance in his community, and his imprisonment shows the tremendous power that Europeans have over them. While his community is facing the threat of a colonial superpower, Ezeulu gets busy with his personal grudge. But Ezeulu is not an all unwise man. The novel shows ample examples of his wisdom. For example, when Jekopu, an African native, comes to his house as Winterbottom's messenger, Ezeulu says to Akuebue,

The white man sends a man from Umuru, and the man from Umuru is shown the way by a man of Umuro. ... What did I tell you, Akuebue? Our sages were right when they said that no matter how many spirits plotted a man's death, it would come to nothing unless his personal god took a hand in the deliberation (p. 168-169)

But this wisdom vanishes as Ezeulu's mind gets preoccupied with revenge on his own people while he is in prison. As he thinks about the prospect of revenge, we get the image of a conniving and ill-willed Ezeulu whose heart is seething with malice: "Ezeulu finally revealed that he intended to hit Umuro at its most vulnerable point — the Feast of the New Yam" (p. 253). Like Europeans, even the Chief Priest of Umuro has started to look for his own people's "vulnerable" points. Achebe shows Ezeulu's desire for revenge several times using graphic language. While coming back to Umuro from Okperi after his release, Ezeulu uses the rain on the way as an excuse to fuel his desire for revenge:

This rain was part of the suffering to which he had been exposed and for which he must exact the fullest redress. The more he suffered now; the greater would be the joy of redress. His mind sought out new grievances to pile upon all the others (p. 225).

It seems that Ezeulu was waiting for something like this, and his imprisonment in Okperi has exactly given him the reason to punish Umuro that he was looking for. Back at home, he is surprised by the hospitality and respect from his family and villagers because he expected the opposite behaviour from them. Yet he is quick to remove from his mind the confusion about whether he should harm these people who are concerned about him and sticks to his decision to take revenge. The language that Achebe uses to show how Ezeulu gloats over the prospect of punishing his people exposes his macabre self: "The old priest's face glowed with happiness, and some of his youth and handsomeness returned temporarily from across the years. His lips moved, letting through an occasional faint whisper" (p. 256). So Ezeulu, the Chief Priest, is acting like an enemy of Umuro. When people come to tell him that he may have lost the count of the moon because of having stayed in prison and when the titled dignitaries of Umuro come to request him to eat the remaining yams so that he can declare the date for the New Yam Feast, he talks to them diplomatically justifying his refusal to eat the yams. He even goes to the extent of thinking that by imprisoning him, the white man has taken sides with him by "giving him a *weapon* with which to fight *his enemies*" (p. 241, emphasis added). This suggests that Ezeulu was looking for some justifiable excuse to give vent to the malice in his mind. He starts thinking of the people of Umuro as his "enemies". With this attitude, he can never hold them together and must cause disunity. What makes it worse is that he thinks that even Ulu, his deity, supports his evil intent. During his imprisonment, Ezeulu feels that Ulu must be impatient for his release and is going to take revenge on his behalf. Later even Ulu abandons him. Ezeulu refuses to accept that his imprisonment is at least partially his own fault. Moreover, instead of thinking of Ulu as the deity of the people, he is treating him like his personal protector. When dignitaries of Umuro come to request him to eat the remaining yams, he tells them that if a god demands the sacrifice of a chick, he may ask for a goat if approached a second time. He says this without considering the fact that he has already made the biggest sacrifice, not to god but to the white man — the sacrifice of his son, Oduche. Besides, he chooses to learn about Europeans and their religion even though he thinks that it is "close on profanity" (p. 241), that is, against god, but he does not feel that if that is possible, it may also be possible to eat the yams to save people from a massive disaster. Such an attitude naturally turns him into "a public enemy" (p. 264), and, as he is at the centre of the religious part of the community, it foretells something ominous for the people. When he returned from imprisonment, he was surprised to see people's respect for him as he had refused the offer to be made the warrant chief. He could have lived in symbiosis with them with that respect, but because of his soaring arrogance, he continues to consider his own people his enemies and then, in turn, is considered an enemy by them. As he has recently seen

what the white man can do, it is the call of time to be reconciled with his people, but Ezeulu's mind is preoccupied with only one thing — revenge.

As the Chief Priest, Ezeulu is supposed to respect Igbo traditions, and he really does. He says to Oduche, "The world is changing, ... I do not like it" (p. 55). Then he also makes it clear several times that it is pragmatic to accept some changes considering the changes in circumstances: "a man must dance the dance prevalent in his time" (p. 234). Such pragmatism aligns him with modern lines of thoughts, but it vanishes when it comes to withholding the date for the New Yam Feast. Despite being the Chief Priest, Ezeulu underestimates the magnitude of the importance of the feast and the catastrophe that any disruption will cause in all spheres of their lives. The feast marks the beginning of a new year when a new harvest is taken home. As the festival is a reminder of the formation of the confederacy, Umuaro, it is of vital importance and is related to the roots of Umuaro. Besides, withholding the date impedes Ogbuefi Amalu's funeral feast. By withholding the date for the feast, Ezeulu not only defies Igbo traditions and institutions but also dares to disrupt the natural counting of their time, which Igbo life and culture centre around.

When he was imprisoned in Okperi, Ezeulu sent Obika to his house from there. He could have got him to bring the remaining yams from his house. When his family members came to meet him in Okperi, he could also have got them to bring the yams, But he did not. The question remains whether he was waiting for an excuse to forego eating the yams and thus endanger his people. He tells the ten titled men of Umuaro that it is Ulu's decision that he should eat the remaining yams in due time, but in other cases, he has shown flexibility in his adherence to the fixity of culture and religion. His grandfather banned the culture of carving faces in Umuaro, which means that Igbo culture can accommodate change, and Ezeulu also supports his grandfather's decision. Some concessions could have been made, especially when the entire community is in danger, and the feast is crucially important. But Ezeulu shows no flexibility in this case.

Talking about the "notion of duality" in the Igbo belief system, Achebe says in his essay, "Chi in Igbo Cosmology", "Wherever Something stands, Something Else will stand beside it. Nothing is absolute" (Achebe, 2014). Ezeulu fails to perceive this, and his tendency towards absolutism brings about his alienation from his clan. In his revenge spree, he forgets what stands beside him. Achebe also says, "nothing is totally anything in Igbo thinking; everything is a question of measure and degree" (Achebe, 2014). Ezeulu gets confused when it comes to "measure and degree". He often reasons pathetically when it comes to forming notions of Ulu and his intervention. For example, he reasons that Ulu has facilitated the festival of the Pumpkin Leaves by bringing an end to trouble regarding his daughter, Akueke's marriage. But when things much worse, like Oduche's abomination or Obika's being beaten by Mr. Wright, happen, Ulu remains silent about them. This suggests that Ezeulu interprets Ulu's action as per his convenience. This complacency is seen in other cases also. When Obika is beaten by Mr. Wright, Ezeulu fails to resolve the matter and smugly says, "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 anymore" (Achebe, 1964a, p. 116). Ezeulu fails to realize that the threads of unity and security are gradually fraying, and no complacency can be afforded now. He has always walked ahead of his clan without looking back, and his clan has duly followed him. But this time, much is happening behind his back.

As far as Igbo culture, tradition and religion are concerned, it is very important to know the status of each of these vis-à-vis Igbo individuals and the Igbo community. Igbo thinking and mores are religion centred. They depend on the oracles of gods to learn divine decisions. Their religion has a great role to play in their unity, and any disintegration in their society must be accompanied through disintegration or confusion in religious beliefs. Achebe's way of dealing with the Igbo religion is very pragmatic and flexible. As an avid champion of African unity, he sees religion as acting like roots to hold his people together. Igbo religion is the result of the age-old belief system of the people and is inextricably connected to all the spheres of their life. Achebe's purpose is not to deal with the question of the validity of this religion; he sees it as something important in holding people together. In *Arrow of God*, he presents the background of priesthood in Umuaro and the gods that they worship. When six villages came to form Umuaro for the sake of protection against Abam, they needed a god and a priest. They chose Ulu as their deity and Ezeulu's ancestor, who tentatively accepted priesthood, as Ulu's priest. It was after this that the newly chosen priest transformed into a spirit. The six villages turned from six different deities to one, Ulu. From Nwaka's account, we learn that the people of Aninta abandoned their deity and his priest as the deity failed them. Achebe points out that the six villages came together and installed Ulu as their deity. So it was a democratic decision. If a people can choose or abandon their deity, what gains more important here is the people and a democratic and egalitarian view of life rather than one based on the self-centred or autocratic attitude of a Chief Priest or the deity himself. To know to what extent Achebe thinks a god can influence Igbo life, one should consider his essay, "Chi in Igbo Cosmology". In this essay, Achebe at first establishes the importance of chi, the personal god of an individual in Igbo, thinking like this:

If you want to know how life has treated an Igbo man, a good place to look is the name his children bear. His hopes, his fears, his joys and sorrows, his grievances against his fellows, or complaints about the way he has been used by fortune, even straight historical records, are all there (Achebe, 2014).

He shows that a man's fate depends on his *chi*. According to Igbo belief, nothing can stand alone, and *chi* is a man's identity or counterpart in the world of spirits. A man's doom depends on his *chi* more than it does on any other deity. Every man has their own different *chi*. So in Igbo culture, individualism, which has the essence of democracy, reigns supreme. Achebe says,

But the Igbo are unlikely to concede to the individual absolutism; they deny even *chi*. The obvious curtailment of a man's power to walk alone and do as he will is provided by another potent force – the will of his community. For wherever something stands, no matter what, something else will stand beside it. No man, however great, can win a judgment against all people (Achebe, 2014).

This is where Achebe draws a line between individual freedom and the need for communal unity. A man does have his free will, but he must walk with his clan, which Ezeulu refuses to do. Individualism is to be hailed, but the Igbo community denies absolute freedom even to *chi*. Whether it is *chi* or Ulu, the interest of the community is always to be considered the most important, and there must be flexibility in religion as the installation of gods and priests depends on people. As Ezeulu fails to perceive this, he and his community face utter disintegration and indignity.

Despite his authoritarian attitude and all his rashness and wrong decisions, Ezeulu is not all evil. He does love his family, his people and his tradition. In his prayer to Ulu, he is seen to ask for the welfare of his family and people. In a situation when his people suffer as he had withheld the date for the New Yam Feast, "Beneath, all anger in his mind [lies] a deeper compassion for Umuaro" (Achebe, 1964a, p. 274). Ezeulu is not a foolish character either. He holds pragmatic views and is often seen to support change. Achebe says about him, "as a priest, he goes to the roots of things, and he is ready to accept change, intellectually. He sees the values of change ... He is ready to come to terms with the new except when his dignity is involved" (Achebe 1972, as cited in Saber, 1976, p. 32). The noble aspect of his character is seen when he bluntly refuses the offer to be appointed as the Warrant Chief by Europeans. But he loses this sense when it comes to protecting his threatened dignity, takes decisions that alienate him from his clan and turn him into a veritable enemy of the clan. At last, he loses both his sanity and his clan, and the dignity of him and his clan is also lost.

One thing needs to be said about Ezeulu's imprisonment in Okperi — in Okperi; he is stripped of his priesthood temporarily. He feels relieved of his duty of priesthood after eighteen years. This gives him a chance to see himself as an ordinary man from Umuaro rather than the Chief Priest. When he finds the sky of Okperi unfamiliar, it is a sure sign of alienation because Okperi is his motherland. This alienation is later carried to Umuaro, where it reaches its ultimate form. Moreover, while staying in Okperi, he has a vision in which Nwaka declares him as an ineffectual priest of a dead god. In his vision, at first his ancestor, then he himself is rejected and insulted by his clansmen. As it is not a dream but a vision, it raises fundamental questions about the priesthood and foretells a severance of the relationship between him and his clansmen. Considered from a psychoanalytical point of view, this may be an expression of Ezeulu's hidden anxiety about his priesthood as he has recently faced opposition in Umuaro. As the circumstances are not in his favour and as he is in imprisonment, Ezeulu should have realized the urgency of the situation. But soon after the vision, he starts enjoying the prospect of wreaking vengeance on Nwaka. Ezeulu can hardly get over his personal cause, though, as the Chief Priest, his concerns are supposed to be much higher. He boasts of his central position in Umuaro but fails to realize the immensity of his responsibility. Ezeulu, as says Blaise N. Mac Hila, "forgets that far from being outside of this moral, if unfathomable order, far from being a mere spectator, a mere arrow in the bow of *the* deity, an unimplicated executioner, he is the pivot on which the whole order rotates" (Hila, 1989, p. 129-130). A priest who fails to understand his position and responsibilities in his community can naturally unsettle the unity of his people and facilitate their falling apart.

Ezeulu's tragedy, to a great extent, can be attributed to the confusion and dilemma that the arrival of Europeans has caused among natives. When Europeans arrive, African people have no idea how formidable and organized a force they will have to confront. They are ignorant of the ways of exotic Europeans. For example, while going to Okperi, an inhabitant of Umuaro asks Akukalia whether it is true that when a European lady went out without her white hat, she melted like palm oil. This shows that Europeans are like aliens to them. When such an unknown force suddenly confronts them with their formidable military and strategic might backed by a strong economy, it is normal for them to plunge into utter confusion as to how to deal with them. Ezeulu suffers from the same kind of confusion. He knows little about the tactics of Europeans and feels complacent with his faith in Ulu and his spiritual power to confront them. Following Obika's being beaten by Mr. Wright, Ezeulu says to Akuebue that if he knew that it was not Obika's fault, he "would pronounce a few words on him [the white man] and he would know the power in [his] mouth" (Achebe, 1964a, p. 122). But we do not see any use of this power while Ezeulu is imprisoned in Okperi or on any other occasion. His faith in this power is exaggerated. In a state of confusion, Ezeulu feels that if he has to deal with the white man, he needs to master the white man's power and know its source. When he sees a white man writing with the left hand, he tells Oduche that the latter must learn to write with the left hand to master the white man's knowledge. This again betrays his naivety and ignorance.

*Arrow of God* contains at least four human sacrifices. The first one is when Ezeulu goes to Okperi to meet Winterbottom, which has been pointed out as “a sacrificial rite” (Madubuike, 1974, p. 79) by Ihechukwu Madubuike. Ezeulu sacrifices himself because of his rash nature and is subsequently treated as a sacrificial creature in Okperi. The second sacrifice is that of Oduche by Ezeulu. Ezeulu himself talks about it in terms of sacrifice:

A disease that has never been seen before cannot be cured with everyday herbs. When we want to make a charm, we look for the animal whose blood can match its power; if a chicken cannot do it, we look for a goat or a ram; if that is not sufficient, we send for a bull. But sometimes, even a bull does not suffice; then, we must look for a human. ... we do it because we have reached the very end of things..... When this happens, they may sacrifice their own blood. This is what our sages meant when they said that a man who has nowhere else to put his hand for support puts it on his own knee (Achebe, 1964a, p. 165).

Here he again misunderstands the nature of sacrifice. If he has sacrificed Oduche, he must relinquish all his claims on him. But that was not his purpose; he wanted to use his son as his “eye” among the Europeans. Oduche fails Ezeulu and hides from him the news of the white man’s offer to the people of taking their yam to the church rather than to the shrine of Ulu. As people accept the offer of the church, it shows that they have already forsaken Ulu, and without Ulu, Ezeulu is of no value. This raises a fundamental question — whether Ezeulu alone is responsible for the doom of Umuaro. As the people of Umuaro take their yam to the church, it is clear that survival is more important to them than religion. But if they had to ensure their survival by sacrificing their religion, they could have started harvesting new yams even without resorting to the church. They are very much susceptible to Europeans’ manipulation and naively put their faith in the church now. People’s surrendering to the church can be considered as the third sacrifice, which is self-sacrifice. This is how Umuaro also, in a state of dilemma, fails its Chief Priest. In the village gatherings also, which are supposed to follow democratic ideologies, Igbo elders repeatedly argue with themselves rather than suggesting any effective way to face the challenge posed by colonization because it is “so much easier to deal with an old quarrel than with a new, unprecedented incident” (Achebe, 1964a, p. 102). Such ubiquitous confusion and disunity keep marginalizing Ezeulu, which, compounded by his whimsical nature, leads him to make decisions that establish him as an enemy of his clan. All this leads to the fourth and the most painful sacrifice in the novel— that of Obika. Obika’s death symbolizes the death of the spirituality and potency of Ezeulu as he resembles Ezeulu the most: “Obika’s death shook Umuaro to the roots; a man like him did not come into the world too often. As for Ezeulu, it was as though he had died” (Achebe, 1964a, p. 285); the sacrifice initiated by Ezeulu’s journey to Okperi is thus rendered complete. All the happenings preceding Obika’s death bring about death as a necessary corollary to them. Amalu’s funeral rites turn into Obika’s sacrificial rites bringing about the fourth sacrifice in the novel. As Obika has been shown to be the most handsome and of rare and excellent qualities, in a way, the best man in Umuaro is sacrificed. Ihechukwu Madubuike raises a question about Obika’s death:

Obika’s death is the arrow that splits the leopard’s heart. It issues from a compound of situations. Obika is his father’s image, both in manner and appearance; his rashness, self-will, embryonic sense of responsibility, his defence of fair-play, his striking manner — all derive from Ezeulu. With a fate blessed by the god of wealth and success, Eru, Obika’s future prospects are excellent, and it is likely that the title of Ezeulu would have fallen to him. Could this be why, of all the sons, it is he who is sacrificed at the end (Madubuike, 1974, p. 85)?

Obika dies while performing the funeral rites of Amalu, the richest man in Umuaro. The death of the richest man and that of the most promising one are brought together. Again, Obika’s death means the end of Ezeulu’s position, dignity, spirituality, hope and, most importantly, his legacy. The way that Ezeulu hides his face in the chest of his dead son and cries, “Ulu, were you there when this happened to me?” (Achebe, 1964a, pp. 284–285) shows the fall of all, even of Ulu himself. After the people of Umuaro, even Ezeulu has now lost his faith in Ulu. This is the pathetic nadir to which all the disintegration, misunderstanding, rash judgments and sacrifices lead. Neither can Ezeulu maintain his unity with his people, nor can Ulu save Umuaro or his priest or even himself by forsaking Ezeulu. When the people of Umuaro start taking their yam to the church, Ulu’s end becomes just a matter of time. As Achebe sees Igbo religion as a means to hold them together, Ulu’s end signifies the end of their unity, that is, of their dignity and freedom. In Achebe’s view, African religion is important in that it helps maintain communal unity and the solidity of tradition. So, when Ulu deserts his Chief Priest, he himself is forgotten and abandoned:

In destroying his priest, he [Ulu] had also brought disaster on himself, like the lizard in the fable who ruined his mother’s funeral by his own hand. For a deity who chose a time such as this to destroy his priest or abandon him to his enemies was inciting people to take liberties, and Umuaro was just ripe to do so (p. 287).



The fault of Ulu is that, like his priest, he also becomes an absolutist. But, as Achebe says in "Chi in Igbo Cosmology" that nothing is absolute and there is always something besides something else, Ulu should not have been an absolutist about the direction of his arrow if he did use Ezeulu or Obika or Oduche as his arrow as Ezeulu sometimes feels. He could have considered the call of the time and used his arrow to unite his worshippers rather than creating dissension among them. Achebe marks the end of Ulu with contempt by imagining him singing after his destruction: "If the rat cannot flee fast enough/ Let him make way for the tortoise" (p. 286)! While Ulu is proved to be powerless, Ezeulu, in the end, is left wondering why he has been deserted by Ulu despite being obedient to him. The state of confusion takes permanent form, and Ezeulu has no answer to anything. The end of *Arrow of God* shows the Igbo social and religious orders in tatters and their tradition giving way to Europeanism.

## 5. Conclusion

The personal, social, political and religious debacle in *Arrow of God* is due to the naivety, ignorance and disunity among the natives and the absolutism and arrogance of Ezeulu. When everything has fallen apart, Achebe's message is: "no man however great was greater than his people... no man ever won a judgment against his clan" (p. 287). As the people of Umuaro feel that Ulu has sided with them against "headstrong and ambitious" (p. 287) Ezeulu, Achebe shows this as a catastrophic decision by Ulu, which brings about his own destruction. When Ezeulu is considering revenge on his people, Ulu chides him by whispering in his ear for considering the fight to be his own. He warns Ezeulu not to come between him and his victim and also says that he is going to settle his score with Ezidemili. The way that Ulu laughs in Ezeulu's ear shows him to be somewhat eccentric and obviously jealous of Ezidemili. If Ulu himself remains jealous in this situation and thinks of *fighting* the people, it is to be doubted how much is left for Ezeulu to do. So, Ulu is also responsible for the disunity among the Igbo people. Again, the need for all-encompassing unity among god, the priest and the people is asserted.

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