

RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE AND IMPEDIMENT: A SURVEY OF ACHEBE'S TRILOGY

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Abstract: religion is not a gift from our parents but a legacy to our children. As such it must be preserved and be transmitted duly from a generation to another. Unfortunately, religion is being deprived from its legendary values structured around dialogue, peace, love and tolerance. Our paper is a try to highlight religious dialogue and its impediment through the Trilogy by Chinua Achebe by focusing on the one hand, on major illustrations of religious dialogue; by underlining on the other hand, some obstacles to this very religious dialogue due to many socio religious-bound factors and aspects.

Key words: dialogue- impediment- peace -religion- tolerance

Résumé : la religion n'est pas un don de nos parents mais un héritage à nos enfants. En tant que tel, elle doit être préservée et transmise d'une génération à une autre. Mais la religion est en train d'être dépourvue de ses valeurs légendaires axées sur le dialogue, la paix, l'amour et la tolérance. Notre analyse est une tentative d'élucider la notion du dialogue religieux et ses entraves dans la Trilogie de Chinua Achebe tout en mettant à nu d'une part, des illustrations d'envergure de dialogue religieux ; d'autre part, des entraves ou obstacles au dialogue religieux dues aux facteurs et aspects socio- religieux.

Mots clés : dialogue- entrave- - paix- religion- tolérance

INTRODUCTION

Neither do religions exist in the vacuum, nor are they studied ex nihilo, in the vacuum. Major international events that have been connected to the notion of religion are among others: the attack on the Twin Towers in New York and on the Pentagon on September 11th 2001; the war in Afghanistan from 2001 to 2014. Then the ever more brutal battles between Palestinians and Jews since 1948 and the invasion of Iraq from August 2nd 2000 to February 28th 2001; all these appear to have pitched three religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) against one another. In addition, the bomb attacks in Bali on October 12th 2002; and Kenya on August 7th 1998; the conflict in Sudan, the kidnapping of 276 Nigerian schoolgirls by Boko Haram's organisation on April 14th 2014, the attack on the seaside of Grand Bassam on March 13th 2016 by a so-called islamist group and the burning of mosques and churches respectively by Christians and Muslims around the world. All these barbaric scenes and other deviations that are unfortunately inherent to religious ignorance have affected and continue to jeopardise religious dialogue within communities and between religions. The above misconception and

misunderstanding of religion has been spoiling seriously for ages the notoriety of religion bringing about many clashes and deadly confrontations that impact adepts. Nevertheless, religion is more than being conflict-bound, a receptacle of any kind of villainy and barbaric attitude. Religion has rather dialogic- unifying features; a philanthropic dimension as Ahmet Kurucan asserts in *Dialogue in Islam Qura'n- Sunnah- History*:

Dialogue between followers of different faiths gives them the opportunity to talk to and to listen each other, getting to know and learning to understand the 'other'. In interfaith dialogue we try to approach our partner in the spirit of tolerance, truthfulness sincerity, love, respect and good will, without willing the other to accept our own beliefs or ideas (20).

This religious intolerance and the quest for more religious dialogue have already been a matter at issue in the Anglophone African writers' oeuvres in general. This can be perceived in *The Interpreters* (1965) by Wole Soyinka where he highlights a religious dialogue through the marriage of a Muslim with a Christian woman. Then John Mbiti will also evoke religious dialogue in *African Religion and Philosophy* (1999), while *The River Between* (1965) by Ngugi Wa Thiong'o tackles religious conflict. The above issue of religious dialogue along with its ins and outs have known a favourable echo in Chinua Achebe's *Trilogy* particularly. The late prominent Nigerian Writer realised a tremendous literary success partly owed to the expressiveness of the themes of religious dialogue and religious intolerance, our concern in this very paper. Indeed, he was made a world-famous writer thanks to his *Trilogy*, a compilation of three novels. First, *Things Fall Apart* (TFA, 1958) in which one can witness religious oppositions between Christianity embodied by the new convert Nwoye and the white man; and African traditional religion promoted by Okonkwo. Second, *No Longer at Ease* (NLAE, 1960) that illustrates the religious opposition between Isaac Okonkwo and the Umuofia's guardians of African traditional religion. Third, *Arrow of God* (AOG, 1964), evokes a case of religious dialogue through Ezeulu's attitude as he agrees to send his son Oduche to western religion.

This paper does not merely deal with cases of religious dialogue and its obstacles in Achebe's *Trilogy*. It principally exposes two phenomena of heterogeneity concerning Christianity and African traditional religion which collide and coexist in a harmonious way. The contribution shows that when these two religions coexist, they impact the adepts either positively or negatively. To reach the objective, the study resorts to Semiotics and the postcolonial approaches in a parallel way.

Semiotics deals with the study of signs and their meanings. Its interest is concerned with the production of meanings from sign-systems that are linguistic or non-linguistic. we will

resort to semiotic approach because our corpus *The Trilogy* is filled with symbols and signs that can be easily deciphered with the above literary theory. This is all the more evident since Chinua Achebe will refer to significant signs and symbols such as kola nut, python, yam, moon, mask, proverbs. All of these elements are pregnant with meaning helping to convey codified messages that semiotic theory can make readers interpret easily. Then the religious festival and other events rich in terms of meanings are of particular interest with semiotics.

The latter, postcolonial theory appeared in the late 19th century and knew a breakthrough in the 20th century. Postcolonial theory considers vexed cultural-political questions of national and ethnic identity, 'otherness', race, imperialism, and language, during and after the colonial periods. It draws upon post-structuralist theories such as those of deconstruction in order to unravel the complex relations between imperial 'centre' and colonial 'periphery'. The use of this literary theory is motivated by the fact that all along the study, we will tackle the Igbo cultural and religious richness, an undeniable piece of evidence that rejects any Eurocentrism; the refusal of European values considered to be superior or appearing as universal ones. Here the evoking of supreme gods such as Ulu, Chukwu, Idemili, and minor gods like Eru, Nwanyieke and chi: strong symbols of Igbo religion on the one hand; the celebration of the New Yam festival and the Pumpin Leaves Festival on the other hand, are eloquently corroborating the existence of true African culture and religions which deny vehemently Eurocentrism.

Our analysis will be structured around two major parts. First, to grasp the deepness and expressiveness of the Igbo religion that denies Eurocentrism, we are going to explore the literary survey of aspects of Igbo religion background. Second, in order to apprehend that religion displays peaceful dialogical and harmonious features that appear to be trampled underfoot, a focus will be put on the religious dialogue and impediment.

I. Literary Survey of Aspects of Igbo Religion Background

Before investigating this content, it is worth indicating what is meant by 'religious background'. We have already defined religion through *Cambridge Academic Content Dictionary* as "the belief in and worship of a god or gods, or any such system of belief and worship in" (793). As for 'background', *The Oxford Dictionary of Current English* presents it as "person's education, social circumstances, explanatory or con-tributory information or events" (54). These definitions from the two dictionaries lead us to deduce that 'religious background' can be apprehended as the origins; the inner and outer events and circumstances that contribute to erect or bring about the Igbo manner of belief and worshipping. The

examination of this part is going to be focused on the Igbo religious backgrounds before and after colonization.

On the one hand, one has to know, that the Igbo pre-colonial community was intertwined with religion. This can be perceived in the village communal meeting, where two families come before the *Egwugwu* to settle a dispute. *Egwugwu* are believed to be villagers that dress up as masked ancestral spirits, each one representing one of the nine villages of the clan and the identities of the masked ancestral spirits are known by none. But Achebe reveals that Okonkwo is one of the nine *Egwugwu* as he wrote:

Okonkwo's wives, and perhaps other women as well, might have noticed that the second *egwugwu* had the springy walk of Okonkwo. And they might also have noticed that Okonkwo was not among the titled men and elders who sat behind the row of *egwugwu* (*TFA*, 72).

The communal meeting presents the *Egwugwu* as a court allows both sides to plead their case and then they come to a decision, which is carried out and people accept it. Such an initiative is taken under the supervision of the gods, goddesses, ancestors, and elders who are all included in the community and make decisions through their representatives that are the *Egwugwu*. One has to know that every *Egwugwu* represents one of the nine villages of Umuofia and “The nine villages of Umuofia had grown out of the nine sons of the first father of the clan” (*TFA*, 71). Then one should not forget that “Evil Forest represented the village of Umueru, or the children of Eru, who was the eldest of the nine sons” (71). So, the *Egwugwu* as the spiritual and religious entities under the supervision of the ancestors and gods who make the right decisions taking into account the community’s best interest.

The Igbo identity in *Arrow of God* is deeply dealt with through the indigenous tribe when evoking the relationship between the religious institutions and traditional beliefs. This analysis depicts the tribe’s perception to set the principles of their society along with certain customs and social patterns. Ezeulu, the priest of Ulu is at the centre in terms of preservation of the religious patterns. Before the arrival of the missionaries, the Igbo people were known as the primitive tribe of Nigeria who were endowed with their own socio-religious values. Their religious influence should not be overlooked. In fact, this influence is perceptible through the domestic forces and their nature, effect and manner. For example the ‘*Ikenga*’ is described as the strength of a man’s right arm. The Igbo clan had the protective deities in the villages known as *Idemili*, *Ogwugwu*, *Udo* and other Gods of Umuaro. Individual life of the Igbo people was controlled by the spiritual forces. The relationship between a man and his ‘*chi*’ (personal God) establishes the link to the ancestors. It regulates the traditional norms among the people to get

control over the evils. As for The rituals and the festivals they foster the social identity and unify them at the time of the crisis. This is illustrated through the prayer of Ugoye to the God Ulu (*AOG* :73).

Ugoye's prayer to God is pregnant with meaning since it does not only indicate that the Igbo people are religious but it also suggests that the socio-religious achievement in Igbo community is acquired by the means of the prayer. The Igbo's other religious aspect can be perceived through the pre-colonial period and the colonial period. Indeed, after scrutinizing the pre-colonial period of the Igboland one can deduce that the religion of the Igbo people, before encountering with the alien religion was strongly built around the worshipping of multiple deities and supreme Gods. Every kind of god or deity receives a cult or prayer due to his rank. The Igbo religion prompts the Igbo people to believe in a supreme god known as Chukwu, who is believed to live in the sky from where he is said to control fertility and creation. He is a withdrawn god without a shrine or priest who watches over his creatures from a distance and never receives direct sacrifice. The minor gods act on his behalf as Menon clarifies:

The Igbo are a profoundly religious people who believe in a benevolent creator, usually known as Chukwu, who created the visible universe (uwa). Opposing this force for good is agbara, meaning spirit or supernatural being. In some situations, people are referred to as agbara in describing an almost impossible feat performed by them. In a common phrase the Igbo people will say 'Bekee wu agbara'. This means the white man is spirit. This is usually in amazement at the scientific inventions of the white man. Menon, 31.

Then, one must jot down that the Igbo people have major gods or deities such as Idemili-Odinani-Amadioha; these are among other gods which make emergent the Igbo religion in West Africa. In *A.O.G*, Chinua Achebe tackles through a well-structured literary work two opposing deities: namely Ulu and Idemili. In fact, talking about the major god Ulu in the novel, the writer may well indicate that Ulu was chosen when the six villages hired a strong team of medicine-men to install a common deity for them. This deity was made by the fathers of the six villages and was called Ulu. We understand clearly that Ulu is consensus-made god by six neighboring villages. As their god, he will aim at providing the villages with care, protection, health and wealth. Ulu, the god of agreement is the main god who embodies the Igbo religion. As for the minors known as, Egwugwu, Eru and Udo, chi play secondary role in the religion.

Then Ulu has an intermediary, a priest between him and the villagers. He is called Ezeulu (in other words, the priest of the god Ulu). As for Idemili, Chinua Achebe depicts him in *Arrow of God* as a rival god who is inferior to Ulu in terms of importance. He has a secondary role. His priest is *Ezidemili*, meaning the priest of the god Idemili. Both gods regulate the daily

existence of Umuaro village enriching the villagers' religious and socio-cultural coexistence through their intrinsic characteristics. In fact, Idemili is a god who founded the community Idemili; that is why this community is named after him. Idemili is worshipped through the veneration and the respect of pythons supposed to be the embodiment of the culture and tradition of the idemili community (*TFA*, 142).

Once again, one has to realise that the Igbo culture or religion is a dynamic phenomenon that deals with the strong inherent distinctive features by which Igbo people distinguish themselves from other groups. We can even admit that Igbo culture and religion are strongly tied like a tree and its bark. In other words, the Igbo culture and religion are inseparable, not dissociable. So, he who denies the existence of Igbo dynamic culture, denies at the same time the existence of Igbo multidimensional religious aspects.

Meanwhile, from what we have said so far, it is clear-cut that the Igbo are a long-standing religion-bound people. This multi-religious Igbo people's perception of religion leads us to the conclusion that the ancient Igbo people were a people of polytheism since they had many Gods or deities. A people who sometimes create their own gods or deities in order to worship them:

when gods die-that is, fall to pieces-the carver is summoned and a new one comes to life. The old is discarded, left to rot in the bush and be eaten by the termites" (Soyinka Wole, 86).

This passage makes us question a little bit, the immutability of the Igbo religious aspects since their deities are made and worshipped by them: how comes that one makes his own god and worships him? Were the Igbo people only confined to this apprehension and conception of religion? In fact, colonization fell some major aspects of Igbo religion apart. The post-colonial period denotes another depiction of the Igbo society as far as the religious backgrounds are concerned. Indeed, the encountering of Igbo society with the colonial period has engendered many modifications either positive or negative in terms of Igbo religious and cultural backgrounds. These changes are visible in Igbo post-colonial days. Missionaries brought by colonization have challenged traditional religion sometimes; they have even contributed to the destruction of African religious symbols specially the sacred python *Achebe*, (*TFA*, 142).

Missionaries managed to convince the Igbo people and appealed them to join Christianity after showing them, the limits of the superstitious and bad customs of the clan. In fact, Mr Goodcountry galvanizes the new converts to destroy African religious symbols even at the cost of their lives:

Mr Goodcountry told the converts of Umuaro about the early Christians of the Niger Delta who fought the bad customs of their people, destroyed shrines and killed the sacred iguana (*Achebe*, 47).

Even Oduche, the son of Ezeulu was influenced by the Missionaries and tries to harm the royal sacred python which is known as a symbol of ancestor worship. In addition, colonization destroyed the Igbo Legendary peaceful coexistence. This can be seen after the chief priest Ezeulu's imprisonment by the British Administration. The thirty-two days of absence that Ezeulu has endured led to the neglecting of the ritual of the sacred yam and the New Yam Feast, provoking hostility within the clan and the abandonment of Ulu who is henceforth perceived as a false god.

Moreover, the post-colonial religious period is dominated by the successful introduction of Christianity by the missionaries. Even Ezeulu, the chief priest has sent his son Oduche to learn this very religion because he expected a lot from the alien religion:

I want one of my sons to join these people and be my eye there. If there is nothing in it you will come back. But if there is something there you will bring home my share.
(AOG, 45-46)

In addition to what precedes, one should not ignore what the Igbo people endures after and during colonization as far as their identity is concerned. In fact, the encountering of the Igbo people with the alien civilization has been very detrimental to them. This rhymes with the clashes between tribal beliefs and the colonial administration at a period when the Igbo communities were living proudly and harmoniously their religious and cultural experiences. But their contact with Europeans brought about significant changes in the Nigerian villages in terms of culture and religion, orchestrated after the arrival of the missionaries. These 'messengers of the religion' brought by the West will impose their administration upon the Igbo by the division of southern-eastern Nigeria into areas ruled by District Commissioners; they also appointed the Igbos as the chiefs, clerks and go-betweens to help them. This is corroborated by this talk of the District Commissioner to the villagers (*TFA, 154*)

From the foregoing, one has to be aware that the meeting of the Igbo people with the West leads to the disruptions of Nigerian traditional customs during the colonial time. This is all the more visible since Ezeulu has been sent to prison by Winterbotton preventing him from serving the village as the true representative of Ulu. This is coupled with the change of the cultural identity of the clan by the intervention of the missionaries and the appointment of the warrant chiefs from the Igbo clan.

The cultural and religious alienation the Igbo people were experiencing has been predicted by Ezeulu since the harbinger indicators of the catastrophe have already been detected by the chief priest as he addresses his son Oduche alluding to the value of Igbo cultural identity:

When a handshake goes beyond the elbow we know it has turned to another thing... your people should know the custom of this land if they don't you must tell them. (A.O.G, 13).

In a nutshell, the Igbo people are deeply rooted in their rich culture and religion that are perceptible through the new moon's announcing, the celebration of yam and the use of kola nuts in their daily life in addition to the hierarchy of their gods. But these valuable and intrinsic cultural and religious properties have been trampled underfoot at the colonial era and continues to endure this situation at the post-colonial time. The encountering of the two religions has led to the effective self-evident success of Christianity or Western religion over the Igbo traditional religion.

II. Socio Religious Dialogue and Impediment

We mean by religious dialogue, any harmonious communication between two or various religions. Religious dialogue can also be apprehended as the sincere and cooperative relationship between different religions; it is a harmonious coexistence within religions and between religions that agree to accept each other in a shared and peaceful space as Hans Kung states in his book *Global Responsibility*:

No human life together without a world ethic for the nations. No peace among the nations without peace among the religions. No peace among the religions without dialogue among the religions. (Kung, 56.)

Therefore, religious dialogue rhymes with a true religious life based upon tolerance and mutual respect of each other's religious principles ; the acceptance of the other without any intention of religious hegemony. But this harmonious religious coexistence is threatened by religious conflict and intolerance. This situation appears to be an undeniable impediment, obstacle to religious dialogue and to a peaceful religious life. In connection to what precedes, Chinua Achebe makes us have an idea of an internal religious conflict between the two rival chief priests, Ezeulu and Ezidimili in these lines:

In the five years since the white man broke the guns of Umuaro the enmity between Ezeulu and Nwaka of Umunneora grew and grew until they were at the point which Umuaro people called kill and take the head (AOG, 38).

II.1. The Expression of Religious Dialogue in the *Trilogy*

Religious dialogue is inherent to any socio religious life. As such, religious dialogue appears to be very important and irreversible in present-day societies. But, according to Leonard Swidler, this phenomenon was often ignored in the past:

In the past during the age of divergence, we could live in isolation from each other. Now in the age of convergence we are forced to live in one world. We increasingly live in a global village. (Swidler, 2007)

Reading the Trilogy, highlights cases of socio religious dialogue. That is why we are not surprised to see Winterbottom, the British administrator being involved to avoid a fratricide conflict between Umuaro and Okperi (*AOG, 175*). *Indeed*, the British Administrator was cooperative in his action towards traditional religion. By intervening in Umuaro- Okperi conflict, the white man built a peaceful coexistence between his Administration and the villages; and he also favours political tolerance and harmony even though Ezeulu refused his offer to become the British representative in Umuaro. *Indeed*, his summoning of Ezeulu in order to appoint him as the representative of the British Administration, was an act of religious and socio-religious dialogue. The white man intension to settle the conflict between Umuaro and Okperi can well suggest a politico-religious solidarity and dialogue since he intervened as a facilitator, with his religion and military power to stop the fratricide conflict between the two villages (*AOG, 28*). As dialogue brings about dialogue, Ezeulu will not hesitate to follow the white man's dialogic attitude by sending his son Oduche to western religion (*AOG, 42*).

In addition, dialogue appears to be a regulator of religion since it can convince and make people abandon some inner malpractices that most of the time, spoil the image of religion and give it a bad connotation. So, religious representatives get involved to restore the notoriety of religion, making the religious adepts reject some darker sides of this very religion. This is perceived when the British Administrator urged local people to respect some principles. Such an attitude can improve not only their religion, but also ameliorate harmoniously their relationships to one another:

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 must come to your rescue. But we will not allow you to ill-treat others. We have a court of law where we judge cases and administer justice just as it is done in my own country under a great queen (*TFA, 154-155*).

It must be noted that through dialogue, religion becomes an instrument of some socio-religious norms that anyone, whoever he is, is obliged to respect; and the transgression of these norms leads to punishment. This is illustrated by the case of Okonkwo who fiercely beat his wife during the Week of Peace. (*TFA, 23*). These socio-religious norms that require the punishment of he who breaks the Week of Peace, are an undeniable deterrent contributing to shape social and religious dialogue. It can be inferred that the solution to religious contention is intrinsic to religion itself; in other words, socio-religion conflicts have their solutions within

religion through dialogue. Once these solutions are respected or applied as required, then socio-religious harmony and love is restored.

Religion also, contrary to what it is believed to be, displays and encourages tolerance peace and love by the means of dialogue. In fact, Christianity through the missionaries in Mbanta, accepted without discrimination adepts, especially vulnerable adepts and those who had been rejected by their own community because of their social status. The white man's religion gave rather comfort and hopefulness to the new converts doomed to be abandoned to themselves (*TFA*, 125). This passage also focuses religious dialogue, tolerance and empathy since one can see the first responsible of the church, Mr Kiaga convincing the other adepts to accept Mbanta's second class people, is an undeniable sign of tolerance, compassion and equality that any good religion should embody.

Moreover, religion dialogue should be thought to be a catalyst that identifies and resolves interpersonal contentions. As such, it requires that the ancestral spirits or some deities intervene in the resolution of the villagers' daily contentions. Once a family conflict or inter-village misunderstanding is settled by these supreme beings among the villagers, then the settlement of the reportedly contention will be respected by all the community. Achebe illustrated an example of a settled marriage's conflict between Uzowulu believed to be an abusive husband who always beats his wife. That is the reason why his in-laws beat him in return and took back home his wife (*TFA*, 72-73). This illustration is a clear-cut justification of the resilient relationship between religion and society, more it indicates the importance of religion in the social wellbeing and harmony of the people since Achebe made one perceive the intervention of the representatives of religion in the settlement of the family contention mentioned above (*TFA*, 72).

As one can notice, the court is settled on the basis of religious principle through dialogue in order to deal with the clash between Uzowulu and his in-laws, under the supervision of the ancestors and the deities' representatives. The intervention of these supernatural beings in the resolution of the conflict made the event bear a particular aspect and an important dimension that would make each opposing side accept the ensuing verdict. As it appears to us, religion is fundamental and irrevocable in the erection of a peaceful and harmonious community.

Finally, one can grasp how the promoted dialogue by Mr Brown has led to the clan's sympathy and attachment to the new religion. That is why one of the great men of the village "had given one of his sons to be taught the white man's knowledge in M. Brown's school" (*TFA*, 142). One has to learn from this excerpt that religious dialogue towards people will

always bring about tolerance, mutual respect, the durability of religion and the peaceful-massive adhesion of people to religion that they will practice without any constraint.

II.2 The Impediment of the Religious dialogue

We mean by religious impediment, the obstacle to religious communication, religious harmony and tolerance. It can be apprehended as the preventing of religious people from practicing freely their religious faith. This impediment appears sometimes to be violent, compelling and abusing people's fundamental religious rights. As such it turns into clash or conflict within and between religious communities. The scenes of such socio religious impediment are multiple in the *Trilogy*.

In the beginning of *Arrow of God*, Ezeulu is opposed to the carving of god; such an action that he believes to be an insult and a lack of consideration to the supreme god Ulu. But Edogo rather argues that he is carving a mask instead of a god's face, "Alusi". This confusion between the notion of deity and the notion of mask results from a religious intolerance, hence the absence of dialogue orchestrated by Ezeulu towards his son (*A.O.G*, 4-5).

Consequently, when religious dialogue fails in one's clan, the elements of dissonance intensify into a conflict. That is why the prevailing discord between Ezeulu's deity and the older deities was transformed into a conflict: Ezeulu's plea against war with Okperi having been overruled by the villagers in favor of his rival, Nwaka leads him to question the validity of his religious power (*AOG*, 27). One has to deduce from what precedes that hostilities within African religion were perpetrated because of the lack of true dialogue among the villagers in general and the two priests in particular. In fact, the willingness of both Ezeulu, the chief priest of Umuaro six-gathered villages and Ezidimili, the rival priest, has brought about the dislocation of the Umuaro village. In such a context, the division of the villagers will engender undoubtedly, enmity that can bear a dangerous dimension.

The religious dialogue between Ulu and his Priest Ezeulu is suddenly broken when Ezeulu considers himself as "a watchman" by refusing to announce the new yam Festival, he is automatically reproached with such an attitude by Ulu:

'Ta! Nwanu!' barked Ulu in his ear, as a spirit would in the ear of an impertinent human child. 'Who told you that this was your own fight?' (*A.O.G*, 19).

In addition, Okonkwo refusal in *Things Fall Apart*, to put up with the new religion, to dialogue with the Christians tolerating them in Mbanta, will bring about many clashes; among

others, serious scenes of conflicts leading to tragedies. As for his son Isaac Okonkwo, the Christianity deep-rooted adept, he will quarrel sometimes with him.

One should not overlook the pride and stubbornness of Ezeulu that jeopardise religious dialogic communication between the villagers and him. Ezeulu decides to avenge himself against the villagers since they have been passive during his detention by the British administration in Okperi. So, he refuses to meet them whenever they arrive to discuss over the new harvest (*AOG*, 207).

Another impediment to socio religious dialogue can be perceived through Umuaro village's refusal to be hospitable to missionaries. The opposition of Umuaro people to the white man's setting in Umuaro rhymes with the villagers' inhospitality to Western civilization, coupled with the religion. That is the reason why Umuaro people consider Ezeulu's friendship with white man as a betrayal. This friendship becomes all the stronger since Ezeulu tells the truth to winterbotton in order to settle the conflict over the land of okperi. In addition, other villages have also led serious resistances to the settlement of Christians; this illustrates intolerance, obstacle to religious dialogue. For example, Abame was one of the sad notorious villages that opposed vehemently to missionaries by killing one of them. The ensuing retaliation from the colonizers was so serious that it is still stuck in the memory of the whole Igboland (*T.F.A*, 116). Here, the inter-religious conflicts, expression of the lack of dialogue is clear-cut since one can perceive the direct confrontation of the different adepts. Once again, this religious clash, is an expression of ignorance and intolerance that brought about the death of an innocent individual. As it appears to us, the opposition of the villagers to Christianity is not only physical, but also verbal. This opposition of the villages to Christianity has always engendered significant damages among adepts who could avoid such hostilities if only they had been tolerant, wise and dialogic to one another as true and sincere religion requires.

CONCLUSION

No society either African or Western can remain in harmony without the strict respect of the rules and principles they impose on themselves, no matter what kind these principles and rules must be. One of these kinds of principles and rules is believed to be religious principles among which religious dialogue appears to be fundamental for any socio religious stability and harmonious coexistence. But unfortunately, religious dialogue is trampled underfoot bringing about many conflicts around the world with all their corollaries. How can people jeopardise

their own lives by ignoring the principles they have issued for their socio religious well-being? Hence the impediment of socio religious dialogue.

The analysis we have been making so far has enabled us to retain that religious dialogue does exist within traditional religion and between Christianity and African traditional religion as Chinua Achebe highlighted it through the *Trilogy*. But this socio religious dialogue has been neglected by religious leaders as well as by the adepts who behave either on purpose or by ignorance ; engendering conflict leading most of the time to fratricide.

In the light of all we have underlined above, we cannot overlook the ingenuity with which Chinua Achebe succeeded brightly to write the *Trilogy*, our corpus. The expressiveness and the clarity of the message he conveyed through an irreproachable language, known as a significant tool used in the achievement of any literary masterpiece, make him a worldwide famous writer. Indeed, the Nigerian writer knew an undeniable literary breakthrough in shaping his literary technique that unveils the scope of his literary competence.

In Koffi Jérôme Kra's terms, (2017 P4175) « Pour être artiste, il faut créer quelque chose qui va au-delà du réel. Au-delà d'une simple narration. » « being an artiste requires producing something that goes beyond the reality; something beyond the mere narration » (my translation). As we can see, Chinua Achebe, through his œuvres goes beyond the mere narration depicting the ins and outs of religion along with its dialogic aspect and the obstacles to this very religious dialogue.

Religion should not be misled from its original and philanthropic essence as it has been inherited long ago. It should preserve jealously its essential values built around tolerance, love and peace that bring about sincere dialogue unfortunately threatened by political and other ambitious purposes.

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