THE QUEST FOR SOCIAL ORDER IN THE NOVELS OF ELECHI AMADI

BY

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DEDICATION

For

my parents -- Ikwo and Akpan

and

my son, Itoro - Abasi

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis which is a product of my own research work has also been written by me. It has not been presented in any previous application for a higher degree. All quotations are indicated and the sources of information are duly acknowledged by way of references.

.....

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NOVEMBER, 1984

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ABSTRACT

Social Order is a recurring theme in Amadi's novels: The Concubine, The Great Ponds and The Slave. Social Order has to do with the roles played by individual members of society towards the society's survival. In traditional society such as Amadi's Ikwerre, the backgound of the trilogy, social order is based on the religious beliefs of the community which also spell the norms and values of the society. This study focuses on the theme of social order raised by Amadi in the trilogy.

Chapter one begins with the appraisal of the critical works and attempts to conceptualize social order. The chapter discusses the views on social order of functionalists and marxists as applied in Amadi's work and as a base for examining the Ikwerre concept of what constitutes orderliness and dis-orderliness in society.

A Chapter is given to each novel. Thus, chapters Two to Four discuss The Concubine, The Great Ponds and The Slave respectively. In each case, a look is taken at how, why and by whom social disruption

is brought about in each novel. Attention is given to the portraits of the major characters in each novel with a view to tracing orderliness or dis-orderliness in the society to the flaws in these characters. Social conventions and their ultimate pressure on the characters are also critically looked at. An examination is also made of how the conflicts are settled or contained, whether order is restored in the end and the effects of all these on the societies. Comparisons are drawn with other novelists such as Achebe and Ngugi.

Chapter Five, which is the conclusion, summarises the major arguments advanced in the study, re-evaluates Amadi's literary qualities, draws parallels between the novels, thematically and structurally, and discusses Amadi as a committed writer who quests for order in nation-building.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Most critics marginalise Elechi Amadi's work; the few who treat Amadi's work concentrate on The Concubine to the general neglect of his other two novels. Virginia Ola, Emmanuel Obiechina, Juliet Okonkwo and Eustace Palmer typify the attitude of critics to Amadi's work.

Ola's reference to Amadi stands only as an appendage in her doctoral thesis, in which she discusses the concept of marriage. She singles Amadi out as the only West African novelist who presents the traditional African woman as she is and what functions her society expects of her. According to Ola, while most West African novels treat women as finding fulfilment in marriage, followed by timely pregnancy and childbirth, The Concubine does not. In her words: 'The Concubine seems to be the one novel where the author does not fall into this trap, of glorification of the African woman[1]. In essence, the African woman Amadi paints in Ihuoma is disruptive of social order in the fashion of the biblical Eve. Through Ihuoma every young man of Omokachi who aspires for her love loses his life to a jealous god, the Sea - king, who claims

Ihuoma is his wife re-incarnated into the world of human beings against his wish. Ola argues that women characters have a close connection with the supernatural and asks: 'why do women characters always have to be depicted as the paradigm of beauty and goodness and why must they always have such a close connection with the supernatural?'[1] Using Ihuoma in The Concubine as an instance of a woman with a close connection with the god, Ola points out the physical beauty of Ihuoma, which compliments her beauty of character. These qualities in Ihuoma are attributed to the fact that she is the 'daughter of the Sea'.[2] In Amadi's words:

> Ihuoma's smiles were disarming. Perhaps the narrow gap in the upper row of her white teeth did the trick. At that time a gap in the teeth was fashionable. Any girl who was not favoured with one employed the services of carvers who could create them .... How lucky she was to possess these physical gifts .... That she was beautiful she had no doubt, but that did not make her arrogant. She was sympathetic, gentle and reserved.3

While Ola's information is of some value in that it reveals Ihuoma's 'gift' as priced by her society and her source of beauty which generates the rivalry among men for her love, and her close relationship with the Sea-king, Ola does not draw attention to the delicacy of that relationship both for Ihuoma

and the society she belongs to.

Obiechina, an earlier critic of Amadi, makes a more extensive criticism of Amadi's work than Ola. While admiring the innocence of village life presented by Amadi in The Concubine, Obiechina sees satire in the same novel as only incidental. He adds that, 'Amadi's concern in the novel is the projection of an idyllic vision of traditional society. Life flows at an even tenor. The villagers of Omokachi are peaceful, kind and generous minded.'[4] Contrary to Obiechina's claim, satire is not incidental in The Concubine. The careful blending of material and method in Amadi brings out the satire. Amadi's craftsmanship is brought out by critics such as Taiwo, Eustace Palmer, Eko and Okonkwo, who refute Mbelle Dipoko's and Larson's allegation about loose structure in The Concubine. According to Larson, 'Mbelle Sonne Dipoko has noted this loose structure in Elechi Amadi's The Concubine which he says at times reads like a collection of short stories tied together.'[5] The craftsmanship exhibited by Amadi in his work, while exposing the basic nature of human beings, ridicules the selfish and greedy traits of human beings. Amadi traces the problems of the society to the flaws in the character of the individual members of that society. For instance,

in The Concubine, the discordant traits found in Madume as 'a dishonest land-grabber' and 'a big-eyed' person for the love of Ihuoma and other peoples' property, and the death penalty passed against him, bring out the similarities between the world of man and that of the gods; both worlds frown at Madume's 'disease'[6]. What is criminal in the world of human beings is criminal in the world of the gods. Again, when Obiechina argues that life flows at an even tenor, he recognises the need for social order which brings about the peaceful and even flow of life among the people of Omokachi, the people Amadi presents in The Concubine.

In his discussion of Amadi, along with Soyinka and Conton, Obiechina also supplies valuable information on one of Amadi's sources of inspiration. In his words, 'Soyinka's work in the theatre and Amadi's and Conton's school teaching gave them insight into cultural and human dispositions in the unfolding West African scene. In that regard, they are also exposed to the impulses that find creative outlet in the novel.'[7] However, Obiechina omits to add that in Amadi's case, his Ikwerre people are another source of inspiration. Amadi displays a sense of commitment to his Ikwerre people, whose background provides

Amadi's work with considerable authenticity. In addition, Obiechina lumps Amadi together with others as follows:

> West African writers like Achebe, Nzekwu, Okara, Nwankwo, Amadi who have lived in both the traditional and urban environments tend to set their novels within either or both. Their narratives flow from one to the other without strain. Those who have not had both experiences, like William Conton and to some extent Aluko are often unsuccessful in their effort to describe the social background of their novels.8

Obiechina pays credit to the craftsmanship in Amadi, who brings together the concreteness of his background into the episodes of his novels. However, neither Ola nor Obiechina tackles the issue of Social order in Amadi.

In a generalised statement from an interview, Izevbaye says of Amadi's works that, 'A year later, a Black Orpheus reviewer of Elechi Amadi's The Concubine wondered whether writers ought not to define the boundary between the novel and the 'extended folk tale'. A close look draws a clear line of demarcation between the novel and the extended folk tale. Amadi blends the two together. Amadi's The Concubine, The Great Ponds and The Slave are what Izevbaye calls 'extended folk tales'. However, in addition, Amadi uses many detailed descriptions of

funerals and marriages; he uses contrasts, such as the comparison between the honesty of Ihuoma and the dishonesty of Madume in The Concubine, and he also uses dialogue as when he presents the breaking of Kola by Eze Diali in the Great Ponds. These literary attributes qualify the (folktale) to be regarded as a novel. In the same interview with Izevbaye on the role of the novelist in the African situation, Izevbaye commends the practicality of Amadi's works thus:

> Infact this is the point which Amadi in The Great Ponds makes. I think most African novelists have come to this realisation that Africa is no longer the isolated group of peoples with trade links which it was in the past. Africa is now part of the modern world and the problem of Africa is how to decide her future.9

Izevbaye puts up a strong case for examining in detail Social order in Amadi's work. By the stress he puts on the African novelists' realisation that Africans are no longer an isolated group of people, he implicitly acknowledges that there must be some form of social order to bring a people together. Izevbaye identifies the problem of Africa as being how to decide her future, that is, the quest for Social Order, but leaves this problem hanging without suggesting how it could be handled. Amadi, in painting the economic loss of the great ponds in The Great

Ponds, resulting from greed and selfishness, suggests contentment and love as the panaceae for orderly coexistence.

In his reassessment of the African novel, Izevbaye again raises the question of Social Order, this time with reference to The Concubine. He says that, 'The function of divination in The Concubine is indirectly related to the larger question of Social Order and the government of men'.[10] Izevbaye's recognition of the 'larger' form of Social Order indicates the existence of a 'smaller' form which exists in Ikwerre in particular and Nigeria at large. He recognises the importance of Social order in the government of men but offers no details on the importance of the issue in Amadi.

In contrast to Obiechina and Izevbaye, who both have relatively more extensive and more useful information, Innes and Lindfors only devote a few sentences to Amadi. According to them, Amadi's view - point is a credulous villager's who tries to cajole his audience along with him. In their words:

> Achebe's ironic treatment of Ulu and other deities is something much more complicated than the simple suspension of disbelief which operates in the novels of Elechi Amadi, his strongest rival among Nigerian writers of traditional life. Whereas Amadi adopts the view - point of a credulous villager through-

> out, Achebe, even while he makes us participate in such a point of view, overrides it with a profound Conradian Scepticism about the transcendent reality of any of the powers that move men to action.11

It is too sweeping a statement to say that Amadi's is a simple suspension of disbelief. The statement raises doubts about these critics' knowledge of Amadi's background. Innes and Lindfors fail to recognise creativity in Amadi. Amadi is down - to - earth in his treatment of traditional life as lived by his Ikwerre people. He records their material culture and demonstrates that Nigeria and Africa have a past based on some form of Social order.

Anne Duchene applauds Amadi's craftsmanship in The Concubine: 'Mr. Amadi writes with speed and shapeliness and exhilaration ... A lovely and a dignified picture of society not still ruled by gods, but governed by a great delicacy in human relationships' (The Concubine, back cover page). Duchene's commentary on Amadi is limited in scope.

Like Duchene, Roscoe devotes only the following few lines to Amadi:

> Criticism unfortunately, allows this term to cover writing which lies at both extremes on the scale of artistic merit, and a master - piece of Dickens or Jane Austen must shelter beneath the same roof as an offering from Agatha Christie,

> Flora Nwapa, Obi Egbuna, Elechi Amadi,
> John Munonye and a host of others
> waiting for recognition.12

Amadi is not on the queue still waiting for recognition unless there is a particular, unnamed audience Roscoe thinks must recognise Amadi's works.

Though fairly extensive, Taiwo's criticism of Amadi's work is largely unsubstantiated. The key sentences in Taiwo on the question of 'Social order' in Amadi read as follows: 'Amadi is more concerned with the problems of the collective survival of members of the community ... it is this situation that brings about the great dimension of social and cultural change one finds in The Great Ponds'[13] He adds that, 'Despite the carefree atmosphere of village life, there is a deep - seated urge for social change and the way Amadi makes us aware of it opens up another aspect of communication in his work'.[14] Taiwo recognises Amadi's quest for Social order, though he makes no more than a passing remark on this central issue in Amadi's work. An indepth appraisal of the great dimension of Social and cultural change in The Concubine, The Great Ponds and The Slave is necessary for our full appreciation of Amadi's achievement. In his discussion of The Concubine, Taiwo points an accusing finger at the

institution of marriage in Amadi for its insensitivity to the individual's emotion. Marriage as a purely social arrangement lacks real emotional fulfilment for the individual and 'creates a problem for Ekwueme whose personal wishes in the choice of a wife are brushed aside by his parents.'[15] Taiwo's concern for Ekwueme's feelings blinds him to the fact that according to the Ikwerre concept of social order, which Amadi portrays in his novels, the society takes precedence over the individual. This means that the emotion and sentiment of the society transcend those of the individual. For instance, Ekwueme's stiff opposition and consequent reluctance to marry Ahurole, a girl chosen for him by his society, shows Ekwueme's deviation from the social norms of his society, a factor which renders Ekwueme an agent of social disruption.

Amadi ridicules the greedy and selfish nature of man as displayed by the people of Chiolu and Aliakoro in The Great Ponds. Based on this, Taiwo stresses Amadi's concern for social order. According to Taiwo, Amadi even recommends compromise, accommodation, and the annihilation of man's selfish tendencies as restitution for orderly coexistence:

> An important feature of the novel is the way Amadi dramatises the diminutiveness of man when compared with external nature ... Life is now hardly worth living. The villagers are paying for their greed and

> unreasonableness, since not even the Ezes and dibias are immune from the disease, the society is shaken to its very foundation and has little stamina left to continue the fight ... Faced with a choice of survival, achieved through compromise and accommodation and complete annihilation, Chiolu and Aliakoro show a desire for peaceful coexistence.16

However, Taiwo does not deal with the quest for Social order in The Slave (1979), published three years after his critique. The myth surrounding Olumati's birth in the Shrine of Amadioha at Isiali relegates him to the position of a Slave in accordance with the traditions of Aliji, the society Amadi portrays in The Slave. Thus, his presence in Aliji society defiles her social order. Aso, a major character in The Slave, is selfish and greedy, traits which bring about his destruction.

Apart from Taiwo, Amadi's preoccupation with social order is also dealt with by Charles Larson, who says:

> In The Great Ponds by Elechi Amadi, the rights of the group are so important that the entire story is built around the rivalry of the two communities for the fishing rights to the great ponds of Wagaba. The tension in the story is centred on an agreement, between the two villages: if Olumba lives for six months, the pond will belong to his village, but if he dies, the pond belongs to the other ... slowly, Olumba realizes that he has no private life of his own at all - every move he makes must be considered for the village's welfare.17

From the foregoing, there is a powerful impression that Igbo Society, of which Ikwerre is a part, is based on group solidarity. This explains why individuals who defy the social conventions and dictates of the society fail; Ekwueme in The Concubine and Olumati in The Slave are good examples. Larson attributes the failure of Ihuoma in The Concubine to "the relative lack of interaction between the heroine and the other characters in the story".[18] Since there is this lack of interaction, the society swallows Ihuoma. In other words, despite her predicament, Ihuoma does not have the power to force the society to appreciate her lot. Rather, she must bow to the dictates of the society. This then raises the question of how an individual can function as an integral part of this rugged society. Since a 'troubled' society is an unstable society, modification of the existing social order is called for.

In "The Missing Link", Juliet Okonkwo focuses on the relationship between the worlds of man and of the spirits, and the consequent conflict dramatized in the tragedy of Ihuoma and Ekwueme in The Concubine. Since man is made up of body and soul, the inter-relationship of the worlds suggests some kind of accord between the two which brings about what Soyinka calls Cosmic totality. In Juliet Okonkwo's words:

> An alternative world view, not necessarily superior to but of equal validity with the European one, is uncovered. A novel like Arrow of God goes above its ramifications about Ezeulu, his children, his wives, the elders, their neighbours, and their God Ulu emerges that eternal Yeastian question which shows the world occasionally overlap .... In Elechi Amadi's The Concubine, the inter-relatedness of the worlds of man and of the Spirit and the conflicts which exist between them are dramatized in the tragedy of Ihuoma and Ekwueme.19

For the two worlds to overlap, there must be some form of social order which Okonkwo points out.

Niyi Osundare identifies the relationships between Ahurole and Ekwueme, on the one hand, and Ihuoma and Ekwueme, on the other hand, as having certain implications for social orderliness and holds the gods responsible for the breakdown of these relationships. He accuses the gods of toying with man's fate. The gods prey on people rather like 'wanton boys' who kill grasshoppers 'for their sport'.[20] Though offering little textual evidence, Osundare's judgement offers a useful framework against which to evaluate Amadi's work. The gods do have a hand in human affairs, as Osundare observes. For instance, the Sea - king in The Concubine knows that Ihuoma is his wife, allows her to be reincarnated into the world of human beings, and uses her as a bait to lure the young men of the village to their deaths.

The flaw in Ekwueme's character is a contributory factor to his death. An instance of this flaw is his arrogant statement that if Ihuoma is a goddess, then he too is a god. This vanity is enough to arouse the anger of the god. Despite all warnings by Ekwueme's parents and some important personalities in the society that Ekwueme should not marry Ihuoma, but Ahurole, he does, thereby courting his own death.

Like Osundare, Ebele Eko offers valuable information about the theme of social order in Amadi's work. Nevertheless, her appraisal of social order in Amadi's work is limited in scope. Eko's applause of Amadi's dedication to his background and experiences refutes the claims by Innes and Lindfors, and Roscoe, that Amadi is on the queue waiting for recognition as a novelist. She argues that, 'If Toltstoy created a universal novel writing to the Russians, there is absolutely no reason for an African novelist to falsify experience that would be true to his people or the natural back - drop of such experience, or to negate the idea of group or communal experiences so integral with black people everywhere'. She adds that 'Standards of beauty in every aspect of African life are set in the eyes of novelists such as Achebe and Amadi'.[21] Eko recognises the importance of group experiences in Amadi's The Slave. In her words:

> The greatest cultural and aesthetic significance of the above conversation (between Olumati and Eze Minikwe) is in the subtle recreation of the delicate balance of judgement exhibited by Minikwe, a sense of wholeness, of morality and fair play, of instinctive obedience to an unwritten moral code, an agreement to a decorum in behaviour, almost palpable in its sincerity and simplicity.22

She further argues that Amadi 'insists on the rightful place being given to such typically African but very non-Western phenomenon' of the crucial role of the supernatural in man's political and special affairs[23]. Though in a few lines, Eko has, in strong terms, pointed at the need for social order. She writes extensively on The Slave and Isiburu a verse play by Amadi, but robs The Concubine and The Great Ponds of the same detailed treatment.

Only a few critics recognise this profound theme of Social order raised by Amadi. The exceptions, to some extent, are Taiwo, Izevbaye, Osundare and Eko. However, even among these critics, none explores the theme comprehensively.

Social order is a patterned way of behaviour among people in a Community. This takes into consideration the norms, values and mores of the people. It is an order based on the collective consciousness of a people. Consequently, the regularities and

similarities in behaviour among a group transcend the action of individuals. Thus, a quest for social order has to do with a quest for the understanding of human beings in the course of their interaction with their accustomed social restraints.

The views of functionalists and Marxists provide a useful framework against which to look at Amadi's concept of social order in his novels.

Functionalists view society as a system, that is, 'a set of interconnected parts which together form a whole'[24]. Among functionalists, the basic unit of analysis is society and its various parts and their relationship to the whole. Thus, social institutions such as the family and religion are analysed as part of the social system rather than as isolated units, with reference to the contribution they make to the system as a whole. Functionalism draws an analogy between society and an organism such as the human body. An understanding of any organ such as the lungs or heart involves an understanding of its relationships to the other organ, and in particular, its contribution to the maintenance of the whole body. Functionalism also upholds that the family, which is the primal social system charged with reproducing and socializing new

members, must be sustained to ensure the continuity of the Society. In the same breadth, this school of thought sees religion as a potent agency for integrating the social system and reinforcing common values.

Emile Durkheim, a major Functionalist, argues that:

> Society has a reality of its own over and above the individuals who comprise it ... Members of society are constrained by social facts by ways of acting, thinking, and feeling, external to the individual and endowed with a power to coercion, by reason of which they control him. Beliefs and moral codes are passed on from one generation to the next and shared by the individuals who make up a society.25

It is not the consciousness of the individual which directs his behaviour but common beliefs and sentiments, which transcend the individual and shape his consciousness. This is a picture Amadi paints of the Aliji society in The Slave, and Achebe of the people of Umuofia in Things Fall Apart. An instance of this in The Slave is the failure of the Aliji Society to absorb Olumati, The society sees Olumati as a slave by virtue of the 'fact' that he is said to have been born in the shrine of one of their gods, Amadioha. Despite Olumati's effort to work as hard as any other member of the Aliji society, the social stigma attached to his birth deprives him of the

right to marry a free-born and even take titles.

Talcott Parsons, another Functionalist, agrees with Durkheim on the precedence society takes over the individual. He sees group consciousness as an asset to a stable society:

> Society has certain functional prerequisites, the most important of which is the need for 'social order'. The question lies with how a collection of individuals can be integrated to form an ordered society. The answer is in consensus, in a collective conscience' consisting of common beliefs and sentiments ..., without this consensus or agreement on fundamental moral issues, social solidarity would be impossible and individuals could not be bound together to form an integrated social unit. Without social obligations backed by moral force, the cooperation and reciprocity which social life requires would be absent. If narrow self interest rather than mutual obligation was the guiding force, each individual finds himself in a state of war with every other.26

This concept can be usefully applied to explain the doom that tears the people of The Great Ponds apart. The concept ridicules the greedy and selfish nature of Wago in The Great Ponds and Aso in The Slave, who are agents of social disorder in the novels.

Like the functionalists, the Marxists regard man as both the producer and the product of society. Man makes society and himself by his own actions. History

is thus a process of man's self-creation. Both Functionalism and Marxism uphold that, 'A society forms a totality and can only be understood as such. The various parts of society are interconnected and influence each other; thus economic, political, legal and religious institutions can only be understood in terms of their mutual effect.'[27] In addition, Marxism views economic factors as a primary influence that shapes other aspects of society. This view manifests itself in The Great Ponds, where the two villages wage wars of attrition primarily based on the economic value of the great ponds of Wagaba. Similarly, in The Slave, Aso is bent on making Olumati as uneasy as possible due to the economic value of the piece of land Olumati intends to cultivate. Marxism holds that the history of human society is a process of tension and conflict. Social change is not a smooth, orderly progression which gradually unfolds in harmonious evolution but rather proceeds from contradictions built into society which are a source of tension and ultimately a source of open conflict and radical change. This Marxist view of history is quite pronounced in The Great Ponds and The Slave. In The Slave, there is a caste system of the free-born and slaves; the slaves system explains why Olumati is not accepted in Aliji as his

father begot him while a slave of Amadioha.

Weber, a Marxist, adds that authority is necessary to enforce discipline in every social structure. Authority serves as a check on the defaulters. According to Weber, 'Social relation is social action multiplied... That is people gathered together behave by taking into account each other's actions and orienting their own behaviour toward those actions. Social structure in this, situation is added through authority'[28] In essence, an individual thinks and acts in conformity with the accepted moral codes of his society. A move to negate this order results in tension and chaos for the society. This view is apparent in Amadi's trilogy. Instances of this view are illustrated in The Great Ponds and The Slave. In The Great Ponds, Olumba lives his life for the society not for himself; every action he takes is monitored by his people of Chiolu. Again, in The Slave, the communal involvement in wrestling matches and the building of Olumati's house engender group solidarity and pride among the people of Aliji.

Functionalism and Marxism see religion in different lights. Functionalism views religion as an agent of social integration since those who share religious beliefs feel themselves united by the simple fact that they have a common faith: 'The highly charged atmosphere

of religious rituals serves to dramatize this unity:[29] Thus, religion meets the essential requirements of social life and ensures that society is present within the individual. Marxism sees religion as a means of perpetuating existing exploitative relations, of keeping the poor poorer and the rich richer. Religion is thus retrogressive and does not socially integrate people. Again, while functionalists such as Tyler and Muller see religion as a response to man's intellectual needs and as a means for satisfying man's emotional needs, the Marxists see religion as trying to make poverty more tolerable by offering a reward for suffering and promising redress for injustice in the hereafter. In the words of Karl Marx:

> Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the sentiment of a heartless world and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people. Religion acts as an opiate to dull the pain produced by oppression. It does nothing to solve the problem, it is simply a misguided attempt to make life more bearable.[30]

According to Karl Marx, most religious movements originate in oppressed classes. The social conditions of the underprivileged provide the most fertile ground for the growth of new religions. He cites Christianity as an example of the religion that has a cushioning effect on the oppressed and disadvantaged, and backs his argument with a well-known biblical quotation:

"It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of Heaven". The hope of going to heaven consoles the poor and makes them bear their poverty.

The persisting problems at the end of each of Amadi's novels tend to lend credence to the Marxist view that religion does nothing to solve the material needs of people; the society fails to get relief from their problems from the gods they worship and believe in.

Amadi is "a recorder of social institutions and material culture"[31]. He recreates the problems and efforts of a people in creating a viable culture in response to the demands of their environment. For instance, in The Slave, when the council of elders meets to decide the crucial issue of the myth surrounding Olumati's birth, the council samples people's opinions on the issue, contacts the priest of Amadioha and finally approaches a diviner to interpret the priest's message. This process of investigation creates the impression of "a society which at least on the surface is orderly and stable as a result of its adherence to tradition and the worship of gods."[32]

Amadi's novels offer a hierarchical structure of Ikwerre society. The Eze is the socio-political and

spiritual head who interpretes to the village or the individual the will of the gods and sees that they are implemented. According to Taiwo, his position commands prestige and responsibility. His power notwithstanding, he is subject to the checks and balances of the gods:

> The Eze is the political and spiritual head who interpretes to the village or individual the will of the gods which he makes sure is carried out. His position brings enormous prestige but also carries with it grave responsibility. But however pervasive his influence, he is subject to the control of the gods as any other man in the village.33

After the Ezes come the titled men, who formulate policies and settle disputes between groups and among individuals, as evident in The Slave. Then, there are the dibias, the intermediaries between the gods and human beings who transmit to the people the will of the gods. The next in line are the titled women who are deemed to possess some mystical powers inherited or conferred on them by the council of elders by virtue of their old age. Amadi presents this special kind of woman in the person of Nyege in The Slave:

> A stool carved from one piece of iroko had been reserved for Nyege, for in spite of her age she could not sit on a three-legged chair with the elders. But she was entitled to Cola and wine as of right, for she was one of those rare women entitled to drink the wine - with - eagle - feathers. In the turbulent history of Echela family she had

> once killed a man to protect her husband while he was atop a palm tree ... The stalker (the victim) was not from Aliji, for no villager could deliberately murder another. Such a murderer would be branded and haunted by Ali, the earth-god, for life.34

Another instance of an African woman with special privileges is painted by Camara Laye in The African Child. Laye's mother's mystical powers puzzle him:

> Are there not things everywhere around us that are incapable of explanation? In our country there were mysteries without number, and my mother was familiar with all of them ... As well as this gift, of magic, my mother had other powers she had inherited in the same way ... Finally, she had naturally inherited from my grandfather his totem, which is the crocodile. This totem allows all Damans to draw water from Niger with impunity ... But at the time of the rising of the waters, the volume of the river is increased threefold; everywhere there is deep water and the crocodiles are dangerous ... so everyone keeps away from the river and draws his water from the little streams. But my mother used to continue to draw water from the river.35

Besides such privileged women in Ikwerre society, generally women are the last on the social hierarchy. The ordinary people in the society consist of the 'untitled' men who are looked at as effeminate. Social groups are defined by age, physical prowess, economic achievements, or a combination of any or all of these assets. For instance, in The Slave, Kwele, the oldest

man, is given the opportunity to testify first before the council of elders over the land case. In The Concubine, Ota Achara is said to have no rival. He is honoured for showing his mettle in the wrestling arena; while Achebe's Okonkwo in Things Fall Apart gains recognition in Umuofia through a combination of his physical prowess, such as throwing Amalinze the cat in a wrestling bout, and his economic achievement displayed in the way he accumulates many barns of yams.

Wrestling is the favourite sport of the Ikwerre people. According to Eko, in Amadi's world, ' 'Wrestling also highlights the indivisibility of the physical from the spiritual in traditional life'.[36] There is orderly preparation for a wrestling contest. Besides the physical preparation, medicine men are contacted to concoct charms in aid of each of the wrestlers, sacrifices are offered to the gods for aid and finally members of the contestant's household come to wish the champion luck before he leaves. Wrestling enforces group solidarity as everybody in Ikwerre is in one way or the other involved. In The Slave, Amadi presents a typical scene at the Ikwerre wrestling arena:

> The arena was filling and children had begun to wrestle. Each time a throw was made the shouts of women drowned

> even the frenzied drums and could be heard in neighbouring villages. The younger women kept the referees very busy indeed. They danced continually into the arena and indefatiguably the referees chased them back with whips... Apart from clearing the arena, referees had to match wrestlers, supervise the contests and carry the winners on their shoulders to parade them round the arena. It was a tough job assigned only to ex-champions.37

The young men tap and bring palm-wine, the women cook and serve the food while the Ezes and other elders pray and pour libation to the gods for protection. Everybody's contribution to the success of the wrestling contest is indicative of the collective conscience of the people.

Similarly, in The Concubine, Ihuoma's roof is mended by Nnadi and Ekwueme. Olumati's hut in The Slave is built and decorated through community effort. Public outings like Mgbeke, a ceremony for girls undergoing puberty rites, dancing, carving and palm-wine tapping inspire the highest sense of community pride.

There is an orderly system of monetary exchange with manilla as the medium. Characters tell time by the crowing of the cock, the crying of the cuckoo and the length of shadows. When the sun sets, it is said to go to Chiolu, a village that is westward. Rain falls after the clouds have hung darkly over the shrines of Amadioha for several days in succession.

Farmers watch for this sign. Distance is measured either by the length of the hand, the foot or by the range of an arrow. Ihuoma's age is arrived at in an interesting manner: 'The piece of land on which her father farmed in the year of her birth was farmed for the last time last year. So, she was just about twenty two'[38]. This was an orderly way of keeping a record of the year in Ikwerre society before the introduction of the white man's calendar.

Amadi also shows how the Ikwerre people live their daily lives under the superintendence of the gods. They believe in their gods and allow their life to be affected by their beliefs in the gods. For instance, in The Great Ponds, Amadioha is not a distant god of thunder but a supernatural being who occasionally appears in the form of a snake. Similarly, "Ogbunabali is not an imaginary god which kills by night but one that has become a living symbol of the people's collective fear"[39]. The people believe that a man's survival depends on the verdict of the gods, and on them hangs the fortune of the whole community. Olumba in The Great Ponds always says that he 'would rather fight a whole village single handed than defy the weakest god'[40]. Similarly in The Slave rather than offend the god, Amadioha, Olumati returns to serve him in his shrine. Thus

in their religion, Amadi's characters are functionalist oriented.

In his trilogy, Amadi thus describes the structure and functions of social groups and mirrors the pressure which directs and constrains action among the Ikwerre. He also records the group process to which individuals are subjected and the influence of one group on another. Amadi's view, drawn from his novels, is thus complimentary to Swift's who in his Sociological Approaches to Problems maintains that, 'One valid way of explaining the action of human beings is to think of it as a product of their social experience ... That the pattern which can be seen in social behaviour is usually the result of group membership'[41].

CHAPTER TWO

THE CONCUBINE*

The Concubine tells the story of an 'unusual woman', a tragic heroine, whose dual identity disrupts the social order, not just of Omokachi society but also that of the world of the gods. Ihuoma's dual identity is described by Anyika, the dibia thus:

> Ihuoma belongs to the Sea. When she was in the spirit world she was a wife of the Sea - king, the ruling spirit of the sea. Against the advice of her husband, she sought the company of human beings and was incarnated. The Sea - king was very angry but because he loved her best of all his wives he did not destroy her immediately she was born. He decided to humour and let her live out her normal earthly span and come back to him. However because of his great love for her he is terribly jealous and tries to destroy any man who makes love to her.(TC,P.195).

Ihuoma is a beautiful woman with fine human qualities and godly attributes. She is the cynosure of every eye in Omokachi, the Society depicted in The Concubine:

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* Elechi Amadi, The Concubine (TC), London; Heinemann 1969. All page references are given after quotation in this work.

> She was a pretty woman: perhaps that was why she married early. Ihuoma's smiles were disarming. Perhaps the narrow gap in the upper row of her white regular teeth did the trick. At that time a gap in the teeth was fashionable. Any girl who was not favoured with one employed the services of carvers who could create them ... Ihuoma's gap was natural and other women envied her ... How lucky she was to possess these physical gifts... That she was beautiful she had no doubt, but that did not make her arrogant. She was sympathetic, gentle and reserved (TC, PP.10-11).

Her physical attributes complimented by her beauty of character became death traps for every Omokachi young man who aspires to win Ihuoma's love. These men include her first and second husbands, Emenike and Ekwueme respectively, and her obdurate but unsuccessful suitor, Madume. To revenge against Ihuoma's obstinacy in coming to live in the world of human beings, the Sea - king lures the young men of Omokachi with Ihuoma's beauty of body and mind to their deaths, as evidenced in the death of Emenike, Ekwueme and Madume:

> Ihuoma's late husband apparently died of 'lock - chest' but actually it was all the design of the Sea - king. As soon as Emenike married Ihuoma his life was forfeit and nothing would have saved him... Madume's real trouble began after he had assaulted Ihuoma while she was harvesting plantains. Added to this was the fact that he

> had a secret desire to make Ihuoma
> his lover or may be marry her.
> All this was too much for the Sea - king and
> he himself assumed the form of a serpent
> and dealt with his rival (TC, P.195)

With the deaths of Emenike and Ekwueme, Ihuoma's spirit is crushed. Here is her reaction to Ekwueme's death:

> Outside Ihuoma lay on the ground
> raving, she clawed at the ground
> and rolled from one corner of
> the compound to the other. She
> slapped her thighs, she beat her
> chest, she raised her hands,
> she hopped wildly. Then she did a high
> jump, let her body go limp and
> collapsed on the ground. She
> tried to repeat the action but
> strong hands restrained her (TC,P.215).

Ekwueme's involvement with Ihuoma marks him down for death. Ihuoma's ignorant involvement with the underworld makes her a death - snare to any aspirant to her love. Ihuoma defends the ignorance of her other identity thus: 'These things are strange and almost funny, I certainly do not feel like a daughter of the Sea. (TC, P.201).

The novel focuses on the personal tragedy of Ihuoma and Ekwueme with its attendant disruptive effect on the society of Omokachi. Elechi Amadi also raises issues such as self - centredness, conflict between the old and the young, and death, which are all disruptive to the social order of the Omokachi

people.

The issue of self-centredness is concretized in the personalities of Madume and Ekwueme, rivals for Ihuoma's love. Madume, a man in his early thirties, loses Ihuoma to Emenike and marries Wolu. Wolu bears Madume four daughters, 'a most annoying thing, despite the dowries he knew he would collect when they got married' (TC,P.4). He is worried about the sex of his children and would have preferred boys, who would bear his name when he died. The traditional society of Omokachi ascribes the blame to the woman for begetting only daughters and the man takes the credit for the boys. As it is deemed Wolu's fault, that they have only daughters, Madume must marry another wife who would give birth to boys: 'There was time enought to marry another wife ... moreover, his daughter's marriages would provide him with the money for another wife (TC,P.4). Madume only thinks of himself. He forgets that there are many families looking for children irrespective of the sex. The feelings of his wife, Wolu, when he takes up a second wife are not considered. Besides, he does not care who his daughters marry provided he gets the dowry.

Socially, 'Madume had one fault most villagers disliked. He was 'big-eyed': that is to say he was

never satisfied with his share in anything that was good. He would roar until he had something more than his companions' shares. Consequently, he was always quarelling over land, palm wine trees, plantain trees and other such things. That was how he came to quarel with Emenike' (TC,PP.4-5). Madume's selfish traits have caused him to lose the confidence of the village elders, who never let him run errands that require intelligence and the extensive use of proverbs. Madume quarrels with Emenike over a piece of land the previous day. 'Many villagers had spoken in favour of Emenike ... 'we have had enough of words', he sneered. 'Let's use our hands too. If you think you are a man put down your matchet' (TC,PP.1-2). Emenike loses the fight, suffers from lock - chest and later dies. Madume has thus become a branded man for shedding the blood of his clansman. The god of the earth has to deal with him. The gods take their revenge when the Sea - king sends a spitting cobra to blind him when he assaults Ihuoma. Consequently, Madume commits suicide. He is punished for his grabbing, quarrelsome nature which brings discord to the community. At the same time, selflesness and contentment with one's lot are shown as pre-requisites for orderly co-existence in the community.

Ekwueme like Madume also exhibits some self-centredness. Amadi describes Ekwueme as 'a good trapper... a reliable... a well-behaved young man' (TC,PP.38-40). On Ekwueme's relationship with women, Amadi says that:

> Compared to his mates, Ekwueme was not keen on women. Oh yes, he could dash around with them in the arena and absorb any amount of slaps and scratches like any other young man but he never really felt excited by them. A lot of his energy went into his trapping and hunting and he always said he was too busy to fool around with women ... the only woman he ever liked apart from his mother was Ihuoma (TC,P.132).

Ekwueme is conscious of his good physique and sees no reason why he cannot choose and do what he wants, as when he thinks he should take Ihuoma for a wife and not Ahurole, his parents' choice. Ahurole had been chosen for and engaged to him since she was eight days old and Ekwueme five years old. Both Ahurole and Ekwueme were made to understand their position as they grew up until they were of age when the bride price was paid. However, at a later stage, Ekwueme realises that he does not really care for Ahurole but cares for Ihuoma. He doest not care about the impact of his change of mind on Ahurole's feelings. He faces pressure from his parents

especially his mother, Adaku, who thinks Ekwueme's refusal to marry Ahurole would be a slap on their faces, a slight against custom which sanctions socially - arranged marriages. Wigwe, Ekwueme's father warns that 'It is almost an abomination to break off an engagement like this. It is unheard of. No one would ever side with you' (TC,P.107). Ekwueme's parents do everything possible to ensure that Ekwueme marries Ahurole. They contact Anyika, the dibia, to determine whether Ekwueme has been bewitched so that he should not marry Ahurole, and, if so, to seek a cure that will bind Ekwueme to Ahurole. After Wigwe has sampled Ihuoma's opinion about Ekwueme and found out she is not interested in marrying him, Wigwe thinks there should be no impediment to Ekwueme's marriage with Ahurole. Very reluctantly, Ekwueme accompanies his parents to Ahurole's parents to pay the bride price. Ekwueme's reluctance to marry Ahurole is disruptive of the marriage ordinances of Omokachi. Little wonder Ekwueme's marriage with Ahurole collapses. Ekwueme's desire for a mother - figure for a wife, which he thinks Ihuoma is, and the peevish cries of Ahurole, a quality most undesired by Ekwueme, contribute to the failure of his first marriage. Ekwueme himself does not break

off from his old habit of eating his mother's over night foofoo, a factor that can provoke crying from an emotional young wife such as Ahurole. He gives little attention to Ahurole's emotions and scolds her every time:

> Ahurole expected far more gentleness than her husband could give. On the other hand, Ekwueme's ideal wife was a composed, stable woman who could get on without too much help from him. More, he wanted a woman who could not only receive praise and encouragement but also give them in return; a mature woman, soothing and loving. A woman who would act for him in emergency if he were away ... Something like his mother. Not quite though, because Adaku (Ekwueme's mother) could get terribly angry with his father once in a while. No, he couldn't face that in his wife (TC,P.138).

The passage highlights Ekwueme's notion of an ideal wife, not the society's. That Ekwueme expects so much from a young wife, but is himself unwilling to make any sacrifices as a husband, denotes some selfish tendencies in him. These tendencies are disruptive to social order. In Omokachi society, a man plays most of the roles Ekwueme is shifting to Ahurole. This explains to a large extent why Ekwueme's marriage with Ahurole breaks.

Ekwueme's self-centredness is also demonstrated in his daring attitude in marrying Ihuoma in the

face of the dangers forecast by Anyika, the dibia. He does not mind offending his father and even several Sea - kings in order to win Ihuoma: 'On his part Ekwueme had a vague feeling he could thwart his father's authority if the worst came to the worst' (TC, P.106). And:

> One thing is clear, I shall marry Ihuoma. She is a human being and if marrying a woman like her is a fatal mistake I am prepared to make it. If I am her husband for a day before my death my soul will go singing happily to the spirit world. There also I shall be prepared to dare the wrath of four hundred Sea-kings for her sake (TC,P.197).

Ekwueme's self-centredness thus contributes to the breakdown of Omokachi Social order. He even challenges the power of the gods by his boasts. It is not necessary for him to pronounce that he would dare the wrath of four hundred Sea-kings'. He violates the norms and values of Omokachi and denies the transcendent importance of the Society over the individual.

The conflict of values between the old and the young is an outcome of the self-centredness exhibited by Ekwueme. His stiff opposition and reluctance to marry Aburole, a wife chosen for him in accordance with the mores of Omokachi, questions the right of tradition to impose a wife

on a young man, and accuses tradition of insensitivity to an individual's emotions. Ekwueme blames tradition for the failure of his marriage with Ahurole and laments it as 'bad luck, sheer bad luck to have married Ahurole ... That was what came out of a childhood angagement. Otherwise he might have married any of the other girls' (TC,P.140). Ekwueme and his parents are in opposing camps. Ekwueme's negative reaction to marrying Ahurole typifies the youths' desire to liberate themselves from the stranglehold of certain aspects of tradition, while the insistence of his parents that he should marry Ahurole seeks to bring the past into the present. Since the present must complement the past and then link it up with the future, Ekwueme's attitude towards marrying Ahurole breaks this pattern.

Three deaths are recorded by Amadi in The Concubine: Emenike's, Madume's and Ekwueme's. Each death is attributed to two causes, one of which is common to all three, the anger of an implacable god. This is a secondary cause known rather late in the novel. The first explanation is that Emenike died of lock chest, Madume of a spitting Cobra and Ekwueme of poison from an

arrow. The death of the three, in three successive years, is a big blow to the society hence a strong disruptive force to social order. Besides reducing the human labour force, it strains the society mentally. After the deaths of Emenike and Madume, Ihuoma reacts thus and gives us a count of the really energetic young men left in the village:

> It was bad for Omokachi village to lose two young men in two years. At that rate there would be too few left to organize village activities ... There was Nnadi, her brother-in law, Adiele, the Oduma beater, Wodu Wakiri, the wag, Nmam, the drummer with his crooked fingers, Ekwueme, the Soloist... yes, Ekwueme. A nice young man (TC,P.77).

From the foregoing, death, like self-centredness and the conflict between the young and the old, is a disruptive factor.

The novel also deals with the various obstacles that confront Ihuoma and Ekwueme and the tragedy which overtakes them as a result of social pressure backed by tradition and religious rituals.

Ihuoma has once been married to Emenike, with whom she had three children. This is a point held by Ekwueme's parents and even Ihuoma herself against Ekwueme marrying Ihuoma. It is contrary to the society's norms for a young man

such as Ekwueme to marry a widow for a first wife, a point Ihuoma takes up strongly with Ekwueme when Ekwueme insists on marrying her. According to Ihuoma, Ekwueme needs 'a young maiden who would obey you and give you the first fruits of her womb. Do not cheat yourself. I am too old for you' (TC,P.91). To marry Ihuoma, Ekwueme would have to break his engagement to Ahurole. Omokachi has never witnessed a broken childhood engagement. Ihuoma warns Ekwueme that, you dare not go against it' (TC,P.91). This dictate of tradition is a primary barrier in Ekwueme's way to marrying Ihuoma. A violation of the tradition spells doom for both Ihuoma and Ekwueme. Ekwueme thinks an individual should be allowed to choose whom he wants to marry. Similarly, Agwoturumbe, the dibia of Aliji, another village in Ikwerre society, who assets he can bind the Sea - king to allow Ekwueme to marry Ihuoma, wonders why the god should meddle in Ekwueme's affairs. The god interferes because Ihuoma is his reincarnated wife and Ekwueme is trying to snatch her from him. Hence, Ihuoma's and Ekwueme's personal tragedy reflect 'the inability of society to effect a reconciliation between what they hold as values and the modification' which, if effected, might augur well for

the stability of individuals and consequently of the society[1]. For instance, Ahurole gets a love potion from the dibia, through her mother, aimed at making Ekwueme love Ahurole and forget about Ihuoma. Ekwueme goes insane as a result of the love potion. Only Ihuoma can bring sanity to Ekwueme. To reward Ihuoma for her selfless help in getting Ekwueme back to sanity, Ekwueme's parents decide to help Ihuoma and Ekwueme consult Agwoturumbe, the dibia, to offer sacrifices to please with the Sea - king to allow Ekwueme to marry Ihuoma. Ekwueme's parents, like the rest of Omokachi, learn the hard way that the individual's happiness contributes to his emotional balance and consequently affects the stability of the society. In the process of getting a male coloured lizard, one of the items for the sacrifice, Ekwueme is shot and killed by the arrow intended for the male coloured lizard. He thus replaces the male coloured lizard actually desired by the Sea-king. According to Niyi Osundare, 'Ekwueme's "lizard" is the juicier other for the Sea-king whom he (Agwoturumbe) is seeking to bind'[2]. With the death of Ekwueme, the society loses her dear son to the whims and caprices of tradition. Ekwueme and Ihuoma 'are victims of their place

in time when belief of a religious kind supported by mystical/magical elements is powerfully believed in'[3]. The rational assessment of Ihuoma and Ekwueme is that their marriage would have worked but for the cruel hand of tradition. Ekwueme's dilemma reflects a broad cultural reality. Ihuoma and Ekwueme are comparable to Nwapa's Efuru in Efuru and Achebe's Okonkwo in Things Fall Apart. They are aware that they may well be 'at the mercy of an indifferent fate, that religious/magical forces can be operative and therefore need to be propitiated'[4]. Despite all the odds surrounding Ihuoma's and Ekwueme's relationship, they also know that they must go about the business of living and this is what they do. For instance, when Ekwueme contacts Anyika, the dibia of Chiolu, another village in Ikwerre society, to divine the god's will about his marrying Ihuoma; Anyika tells him that because of Ihuoma's association with the Sea-king, as his reincarnated wife, there is nothing Anyika can do to make the marriage work. The dialogue between Ekwueme's parents and Anyika throws more light on this issue:

> 'Do you mean to say', he said between clenched teeth, 'that this girl was never meant to get married?' Under the circumstances, No! She was to die untouched by men?' 'Well, she could be someone's concubine. Her Sea-king

> husband can be persuaded to put up with that after highly involved rites. But as a wife she is completely ruled out'... With some spirits marriage is possible if an expert on sorcery is consulted. With the Sea-king it is impossible. (TC,P.196).

The dangers behind marrying Ihuoma notwithstanding, Ekwueme tries another diviner whom he thinks may be better able to bind the Sea-king to allow their marriage. The novel thus reaches a climax when Ekwueme, because of his search for a mother - figure wife, refuses to subscribe to Anyika's divination and looks for another dibia. This dibia, Agwoturumbe, boasts that the Sea-king can be bound through 'a series of highly involved rites' to make room for Ekwueme to marry Ihuoma[5]. An attempt to bind the Sea-king interferes with the social order of the underworld. In place of Anyika, Agwoturumbe thus becomes the tragic alternative. Consequently, Agwoturumbe and Ekwueme are fishing in troubled water. The Sea-king is too powerful a god for such an irreverent assertion to be made against him. In the words of Anyika, the dibia: 'He (the Sea-king) is too powerful to be fettered and when he is on the offensive he is absolutely relentless. He unleashes all the powers at his command and they are fatal' (TC,P.196). Ihuoma is, to some extent, an innocent victim of

supernatural fury in that she learns about the true state of affairs very late, through Anyika's divination of her Sea-Connection. However, in another respect, she is not an innocent victim because she has come to the world of human beings against the wishes of the Sea-king, her underworld husband. Her disobedience to the Sea-king has earned her his wrath; she reaps the consequence of her strong-headedness. Ekwueme is also innocent to some extent. He learns of Ihuoma's second identity, her link with the god of the Sea, very late. At this stage Ekwueme regards offending the Sea-king as a lesser evil to losing the love of Ihuoma. He, therefore, is not prepared to leave Ihuoma.

The Sea-king, due to her disobedience and stubbornness, unleashes his anger on any man who vies for Ihuoma's love. Similarly, Madume's 'big-eye' and Ekwueme's boastful and daring attitude towards the Sea-king are carefully and promptly exploited by the Sea-king. A combination of the flaws in the victims' characters and the lordly attitude of the god breaks the social order. The Sea-king, as his name implies, is supposed to be a king in the Sea and not a god who regulates human affairs in the world. He

has extended his influence too far, beyond the world of the Sea to the world of human beings, thereby disturbing the Social order in the world of human beings. He has used his might to interfere in Emenike's love life. He should have chosen another form of punishment for Ihuoma for her stubbornness and left other 'innocent' citizens of Omokachi like Emenike alone. This reveals the god's indifference to the welfare of the society, for by destroying the society's able-bodied men, the society shares the bulk of the stress. The Sea-king is thus an agent of social disorder in the novel.

Amadi only treats the relationship between Emenike and Ihuoma in the first three Chapters of the Concubine, with Emenike and Ihuoma already married and having three children. He has not given us a fuller picture of how Emenike courted Ihuoma, as he does in Ekwueme's case. However, in those three chapters, Amadi dwells on Emenike's physical prowess, his competence in running errands for the elders and his proficiency as a wrestler. Nnenda, Ihuoma's friend, describes Emenike as 'a fine man... a ladies' man and many women adored him' (TC,P.11). Amadi presents him as a fine man who 'had won the old men's confidence and they always let him run errands

that required intelligence and the extensive use of proverbs' (TC,P.5). Emenike is also a loving husband to Ihuoma and they have been married for six years. He demonstrates his love for Ihuoma on many occasions. A good instance of this is when he comes back and sees Ihuoma dancing and admiring herself in the mirror. He honours her dancing with money and embraces her:

> 'So you have been watching us', she said reproachfully. 'Well, I could not do otherwise' 'Then honour my dancing with a present', She said laughing 'I will he said. He went into his bedroom and brought out a manilla. 'Now dance', he said She danced less seriously now, her cheeks dimpled with suppressed laughter. Her husband embraced her in the traditional way and gave her the money. 'Thank you, my lord, she said and made for the kitchen (TC,P.13).

The quotation also reveals that Ihuoma is a loving and obedient wife to Emenike.

Emenike and Madume have vied for two things and Emenike has won in both cases. They have fought over a piece of land. In this dispute, many villagers speak in favour of Emenike. Emenike describes Madume as 'a dishonest land-grabber' (TC,P.1). They have also vied for the love of Ihuoma, and Emenike has won again. Madume is most unhappy about this and blames

Emenike 'wholly for his loss of the girl he wanted' (TC,P.5). Ihuoma mourns and observes all the rituals of widows when she loses Emenike. This is a strong indicator to her fidelity towards her late husband. Okachi, Ihuoma's mother compliments her for this. According to her, 'It is over a year since Emenike your husband died. You have conducted yourself in such a way which shows that you sucked my breasts' (TC,P.40).

On the relationship between Ihuoma and Madume, Amadi is very brief and presents Madume as a foil to Emenike. Madume has vied for Ihuoma's love; he has assaulted her in her farm when she was harvesting her plantains. His actions earn him the wrath of the god which manifests itself in the spitting cobra blinding him and his consequent suicide. Madume's greedy and selfish nature so exhibited violates the social order of both man and god. He learns too late, through Anyika's divination, that it was the Sea-king who unleashed the spitting cobra on him. Emenike, Madume, Ihuoma and Ekwueme know about the cause of their pain too late for any repair to be effected. Thus, the revelatory moments in The Concubine are always late and shocking, a literary device that sustains the reader's interest to the end of the novel.

Emenike, Madume, Ihuoma and Ekwueme unwittingly offend the gods and pay a stiff penalty. At the end of the novel, though Ihuoma is not physically killed, with Ekwueme's death, she is destroyed.

The Sea-king destabilises the world of The Concubine, while the main agent of such social disruption is Ihuoma. Madume who, through fighting with Emenike, causes Emenike's 'lock-chest', the spitting cobra which blinds Madume are other agencies which carry out the capricious whims of the gods against the society. The god should have spared the life of Emenike and only punished Madume, especially as the villagers have spoken in favour of Emenike on the land issue over which Madume and Emenike fight. However, both Madume and Emenike get the same penalty from the god. This exposes the malevolent nature of the Sea-king.

The various reactions by Ihuoma and other villagers to the death of Emenike and Ekwueme raise an important question as to what is left of the society with her dear sons and able-bodied men gone:

> The song composed in Emenike's honour was sung with unavoidable melancholy. The tune was charming but the words were sad. Even Wakiri's usually clear voice was tremulous as he sang the

> the first stanza: 'Do you know that Emenike is dead? Eh-Eh - Eh, we fear the big world... Emenike had been a wrestler and no greater honour could be done him than to stage a mock wrestling match ... True, death is a bad reaper often plucking the unripe fruit...(TC,P.28).

And:

> Words were useless now, time precious, Agwoturumbe and Wigwe carried Ekwueme into his room and placed him on his bamboo bed. With difficulty he emptied the room of neighbours who were pouring into Wigwe's compound in great numbers. Outside, Ihuoma lay on the ground raving... Adaku was under similar restraint ... 'I shall travel together with my son... where is he?' A hair raising cry rent the air as Agwoturumbe pulled out the arrow (TC,PP.214-15).

The society of Omokachi, given to the sequential burial of her best and young men, becomes diseased, crippled and mentally drained. Ekwueme's death, a note on which The Concubine ends, heightens the physical and mental stress of the Omokachians. It challenges the society of Omokachi to sit up and review her situation with a view to finding a solution to her constant losses. At the end of the novel, the diviner has spelt out the cause of the deaths: the anger of an implacable god, the Sea-king. At the end, the society realises that the gods they believe in deal with them mercilessly and cannot be placated.

Unlike Achebe, who holds the conflict of traditional and Western cultures responsible for his society's general breakdown, Amadi's clash of interests is internal, between the Omokachi society and the underworld of African spirits. Amadi thus teaches that 'religion can be meaningful to a people only if it relates to them in their daily lives, only if it rises out of important aspects of their past and speaks directly to their experiences in the present'[6]. By implication, traditional religion denies the people of Omokachi solace and comfort. Traditional religious beliefs are held responsible for the breakdown of social orderliness. The gods behind these religions swallow 'man and his precarious order'[7]. We learn from Amadi what we also learn from Dr. Tillich that 'a religion which is imposed upon a people from above as a law, is not only meaningless but also destructive[8]. Tragedy befalls many families and many hearts are broken by the lack of solutions to certain pressing religious issues. The society is left to ponder why she must serve a god who is out to destroy her. The families of Emenike and Ekwueme, for instance, have been torn apart. Their ancestral unity has been lost because of the attempted imposition of

an uncompromising religious law. Thus, Amadi favours modification to the existing traditional social order, hence, his has a note of social protest.

All in all, the gods are the most potent agents of disruption as they choose and manipulate their agencies. In the end, social order is not restored. The contract entered into in each case is not fulfilled. Death terminates the contracts between Emenike and Ihuoma, Ekwueme and Agwoturumbe, and Ekwueme and Ihuoma. Emenike's death places the family responsibility on Ihuoma. Similarly, the contract entered into between Ekwueme and Agwoturumbe, to bind the Sea-king by offering the appropriate sacrifices, fails. The Sea-king prefers and takes a human 'lizard' as a more fitting sacrifice to him. Ekwueme finally pays with his life for challenging the Sea-king for the love of Ihuoma. Agwoturumbe is destroyed as a diviner and has, with the failure of his divination, lost his credibility in the society of Omokachi. This is his punishment from the god.

Ihuoma's contract entered into with Ekwueme automatically terminates with the death of Ekwueme. At the end of the novel, Ihuoma remains the Sea-king's concubine. Human contracts fail; the god's triumph over human beings. The mystery behind

Ihuoma's life is unravelled by Anyika, who explains that 'there are few women like that in the world... It is death to marry them and they leave behind a harrowing string of dead husbands. They are usually beautiful, very beautiful, but dogged by their invisible husbands of the spirit world' (TC,P.196).

The society of Omokachi is left in shambles at every juncture as the quest for the right form of social reform remains to be worked out. The stress or death of important members of the society by extension weighs on the society. The Igbo proverb, that when one finger brings oil, it soils the rest, explains the plight of Omokachi. Ihuoma's obstinacy is the one finger that has brought oil; while Emenike, Ekwueme and the Omokachi society are the fingers soiled.

CHAPTER THREE

THE GREAT PONDS*

As in The Concubine, in The Great Ponds Amadi dwells on self-centredness, conflicting values between the old and the young, and the issue of death as disruptive tendencies in Chiolu and Aliakoro, the societies Amadi depicts in The Great Ponds.

Wago, a major character in The Great Ponds, epitomizes self-centredness. Wago is a tough wrestler and a war leader in Aliakoro, He is also skilled in hunting:

> Wago the leopard killer was well-known and was a man to be reckoned with. He had three magnificent leopard skins to his credit, a feat unequalled by any man they knew of. His skill in hunting was uncanny. He had on several occasions brought home live antelopes whose bodies bore no traces of any violence or struggles whatsoever. How he caught them no one knew. Tall and sinewy, he was an able wrestler (TGP,P.14).

The first signs of his self-centredness emerge during the preparation for the first war of the Great Ponds. In their encounter with Chiolu, an

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* Elechi Amadi, The Great Ponds (TGP), (AWS) Heinemann, The Chancer Press Ltd., London (1969). All page references are given after quotations in this chapter.

enemy village at the Great Ponds, a spy of Aliakoro informs Wago of Chiolu's presence. Wago plans a selfish strategy. He asks his men to go near the ponds to fish while a few of them, including himself stay behind in case Chiolu launches an attack. His comrades see Wago's strategy as an open attempt to have them killed and disagree to go and fish. Wago goes to fish in the ponds alone. "In the next instant he was beclouded by a swarm of arrows" from Chiolu, which he caught with the aid of his arrow-deflecting amulet (TGP.P.33). He keeps this experience to himself and signals his comrades to advance. Thirteen of his men are killed in this war. Aliakoro blames Wago's selfish leadership. He prepares protective devices only for himself without ensuring the safety of his men.

Again, Wago's selfish tendencies cause him to get Igwu, the diviner, to prepare medicines to kill Olumba over the ownership of the Great Ponds. Olumba, the strong man of Chiolu, is chosen by the god, working through Aliakoro, to claim the controversial pond of Nagaba for Chiolu by taking an oath in the name of Amadioha. If Olumba lives for six months, the duration of the oath, the pond is Chiolu's, if he dies within the six months,

the pond is Aliakoro's. The god's intervention is supposed to prevent further fighting and to settle the issue once and for all of the ownership of the Great Ponds.

Wago's selfishness drives him to persuade Igwu to use all the medicines he knows will kill Olumba while still on oath in order to claim the pond for Aliakoro. 'So Igwu found himself working to destroy Olumba's sense of self-preservation' (TGP.,P.107). An instance of this is when Olumba goes and climbs a palm tree when he is asked not to do such a thing while on oath; and his consequent fall from the tree. Olumba's fall is attributed by Chiolu to Aliakoro, who 'have employed a powerful dibia whose work is two-fold: firstly to work on Olumba's mind and make him careless of his safety, secondly to prevent any other dibia from finding out what is happening and taking counter measures' (TGP, P.101).

When Igwu's medicines fail to kill Olumba, and Olumba appears to be surviving the six months of the oath, Wago commits suicide in the ponds of Wagaba. He thereby renders the pond unfit for fishing as tradition deems a pond in which someone has committed suicide contaminated (TGP,P.192).

As a result of this inconsiderate act, both his village, Aliakoro, and the 'enemy' village, Chiolu, lose their fishing rights at the Great Ponds of Wagaba. This setback spells economic ruin for both Chiolu and Aliakoro. Besides the economic setback resulting from the loss of the Great Ponds, there is loss of human lives.

The deaths recorded by Amadi in the first six chapters are a direct result of greed and selfishness. Chiolu and Aliakoro fight and kill themselves because each group wants economic monopoly over the Great Ponds of Wagaba: 'Once a year these ponds were flooded and after the flood the villages shared the Great Ponds but some villages like Chiolu had remarkably rich ponds which their neighbours coveted and ravaged when they could' (TGP,P.10).

The deaths recorded between chapters fifteen and twenty are attributed to the god, Ogbunabali, working through Longo, an influenza. Ogbunabali is the god invoked to settle the fishing disputes between Chiolu and Aliakoro. Olumba, the hero of The Great Ponds, is placed on oath for six months under Ogbunabali. The course of his oath witnesses a series of deaths in both village. Besides the

seed of enimity which the wars over the Great Ponds sow between Chiolu and Aliakoro, the impact of death on both societies implants doubts in people's minds about the protective powers of Ogbunabali, saws bitterness, and destroys optimism among the people. War and its repercussions disrupt the even flow of life in the communities affected.

Every Chiolu family has at least one person stricken by the influenza who later dies. Eze Wezume, the Assistant Chief of Chiolu, assembles his people and tells them of the calamity that has befallen Chiolu. The issue of the Great Ponds is held responsible for the illnesses and deaths:

> Critical situations demand straight talk. Eze Diali is sick, Chituru another chief is sick and so are Olumba's two wives and his first daughter... There was a flood of interruptions: 'So is my daughter? 'My neighbour is dying? ... There is no doubt the gods have hand in these illnesses ... I suspect the Great Ponds have a lot to do with our troubles(TGP,P.158).

The death of Olumba's first wife, Nyoma, the kidnap of his second wife, Oda, and his son's illness result in Olumba attending to all the household chores. He laughs at the absurdity of the situation:

> Running the household proved a problem almost as difficult as finding a cure for the sick. Yams and vegetables had to be brought from the farm and water fetched from the well. But these were trifles compared to the preparation of soup. How would I grind pepper and egusi, and cut okro... Olumba could not help laughing ...(TGP,P.160-61).

The death of Olumba's wives has reversed the domestic pattern of Chiolu. He now has to do most of the woman's work. To Olumba, 'It was a mad unforgiving world to be turned a woman in running the house by the cruel hand of fate, manifested in the death and kidnap of his wives in a society such as Chiolu where manliness is held in high esteem (TGP,P.176).

Deaths from influenza increase and the social life of Chiolu suffers as 'no children played, no songsters sang, no irate husbands beat their wives. Villages had the feeling of living in a vast communal grave' (TGP,P.171). Death reduces the numerical strength of able-bodied men in the community. Even the grave-diggers have been phased out by death and all the wells are full of corpses: 'Future corpses would not be as lucky'. (TGP,P.184). The people have their hands full taking care of the dying and the dead. There is

no time to plan for the stability of the society.

There is also the issue of conflicting values between the old and the young. Olumba, representing the old generation, thinks his generation is better than Ikechi's, a young man he likes and whom he teaches to fish. He deplores the inability of the younger generation to do common things such as fishing, a thing he could do when he was Ikechi's age. To Olumba, Ikechi's generation is effeminate: 'Your father has a lot to teach you about stalking. You youngsters are so clumsy? Ikechi smiled. He knew too well Olumba's opinion of boys in his age group. As far as Olumba was concerned they were just a bunch of girls' (TGP,P.7).

Again, Olumba explains the significance of the ends of the rainbow to Ikechi. According to him:

> 'One end of it (the rainbow) is in the land of the Wakanchis, an ancient race of dwarfs. The other end is in Eluanyim where a group of very old dibias offer sacrifices to it. In return the dibias acquire a deep knowledge of herbs and roots and the ways of the spirits. These dibias disseminate their knowledge to their pupils who come from all over the world. Any medicine-man who has not been to Eluanyim is not worth a cowrie? (TGP,P:10).

Olumba expresses disappointment at Ikechi's ignorance. He believes that at his age he 'ought to know simple things like that', considering the fact that 'you will soon get married and your children will ask questions' (TGP,P:9). Olumba shows concern for the ignorance of the youth regarding the culture of Chiolu. To Olumba, the ignorance of Chiolu culture displayed by Ikechi is like a gradual death-blow to tradition. This death-blow is disruptive in Chiolu. Ikechi's ignorance of the Chiolu's traditional method of fishing means he will have nothing to teach the next generation, and the traditions will die.

Like The Concubine, The Great Ponds shows the transcendence of the rights of the group over the individual's though on a wider scale. The entire story is thus built around the rivalry of two communities for fishing rights at the Great Ponds of Wagaba. The tension in the story centres on the outcome of an agreement between Chiolu and Aliakoro. Olumba stakes his life on behalf of Chiolu. Chiolu shows parental concern for Olumba in a bid to shelter whatever he does and says, thereby saving the ponds for their village. Gradually, Olumba realises that he has

no private life of his own: 'Every move he makes must be considered for the village's welfare'. Thus, The Great Ponds is more concerned with chronicling the destruction of a clan, not individuals.

The novel attempts a contrastive appraisal of the narrow-mindedness and greed of man, revealed in the tussle for the fishing ponds of Wagaba. The fishing ponds are of economic and social advantage, hence the bone of contention between the villages of Chiolu and Aliakoro. Wars must be fought for the ownership of these rich ponds.

Eze Diali of Chiolu and Eze Okehi of Aliakoro call their subjects and charge them to fight, as the winner will automatically own the Great Ponds. Eze Diali explains why Chiolu must fight to get the ponds:

> For generations the Great Ponds have been the cause of wars and heavy loss of lives. Some years ago our two villages fought a bitter battle over the pond of Wagaba. My father was killed in it. My senior brother was taken prisoner and sold to the Rikwos across the rivers and we never heard of him again. However, we won this battle and this pond became ours ... (TGP,P:23).

The Ezes of Chiolu and Aliakoro shut their eyes to the heavy loss of lives and misery which resulted from the previous war. They will not go to war over the ponds but their subjects will. Hence

their individual lives are not at stake. Only when Eze Diali's daughter, Chisa, is kidnapped by Aliakoro does he realise that 'no amount of fish is worth a man's life' (TGP, P:57). This, ironically, is the first mark of reasoning since the gory killings over the Great Ponds began. Diali's selfishness is disruptive. He fails to act like a responsible citizen, let alone the leader that Diali is supposed to be. He has pushed his subjects to fight a selfish war and has brought suffering on the village.

Eze Okehi, the chief of Aliakoro, lacks tact, as shown in the negotiation over two of his men taken captive by Chiolu. He insists that the pond belongs to Aliakoro:

> 'We were to do some fishing later in our pond?... Diali your men have not acted right. Firstly my men were not fishing when they were attacked. Secondly, if they were fishing in the pond of Wagaba, they had a right to; they have done so for years. The younger generation may not know the truth about the pond, but we old men know, don't we? We in Aliakoro have not pressed our claims because there have been no molestations until yesterday when you kidnapped my boys. Of course when you hit a goat you get to know the owner? (TGP,PP.21-22).

Okehi thus incurs the wrath of Chiolu, whose angry protests drown his last words. Diali is irritated by Okehi's stand over the Great Ponds, and by his

language too. The warring parties, now on the negotiating table over the release of Aliakoro men taken captive by Chiolu, are recharged. As Diali observes, Chiolu and Aliakoro are 'like men about to disturb a nest of wasps' (TGP,P.21). This is a disruptive stage reached in the negotiation and Diali reminds them that 'pepper can never be one of the ingredients of a soothing balm' (TGP,P.25). Okehi's words have been pepperish.

Again, Eze Okehi, the chief of Aliakoro, who by virtue of his position ought to know better, violates the social order of Chiolu by sending messengers to approach Eze Diali and his elders for the return of the Aliakoro men taken as captives by Chiolu. Eze Diali is angered by this and informs the emissaries that, 'Eze Okehi ought to have sent older men in an affair of this nature. You are too young to know what to do ... Tell Okehi to come down with his elders for a full discussion not only on the release of these boys but on the vexing problem of poaching' (TGP,P.17).

In contrast to Wago, Olumba's heroism assumes messianic dimensions. As in Ngugi's Weep Not Child, in which Jomo Kenyata is the 'black Moses', and in A Grain of Wheat, in which Mugo fancies himself a saviour, Olumba takes on the role of a messiah in The Great Ponds:

> His life is a public property now and we have to keep it safe. What step shall we adopt to achieve this?' There was a flood of suggestions. 'He must not climb trees'. 'He must eat only what his first wife cooks'. 'He must not go to the farm land alone'... You (Ikechi) will keep Olumba's palm-wine trees for him ... 'Olumba, the village will organize communal labour for your farms'. (TGP.,PP:90-94).

Olumba survives the oath in the face of all odds, a clear victory for Chiolu, but he loses the ponds when Wago commits suicide in the ponds. The war and the consequent oath-taking by Olumba, and their repercussions on the two villages, are unnecessary. The Ponds remain unused. Chiolu and Aliakoro lose many lives and relations between the two communities become strained. The absurdity and irrationality in human nature are thereby exposed.

Amadi portrays Olumba as a tactful and selfless leader and causes him to succeed in all the wars fought over the Great Ponds. He even survives the oath, despite Wago's efforts to eliminate him. Wago is a foil to Olumba and Amadi puts them side by side to bring out this contrast. First, Amadi presents the two war leaders, Olumba and Wago, preparing for war over the Great Ponds. All Olumba's men have slimy substances on their bodies; that is why they are not captured by

Aliakoro. After the war, the warriors of Chiolu 'washed off the slimy stuff they had rubbed on their bodies. This lotion had made them slippery to the touch during the struggle. It had also helped them distinguish friend from foe in the darkness' (TGP,P:15). Only Wago rubs the slimy stuff. He escapes being captured while most of his men are captured.

Olumba builds three rafts and splits his men into three groups to take care of the three rafts. He and his men arrive at the pond earlier than the men of Aliakoro under Wago. He makes sure that, while awaiting Aliakoro's arrival, his men carry enough food and eat:

> Olumba who was leading the company raised his hand and immediately the men disappeared without a sound. The rapidity with which they took perfect cover impressed Ikechi who initiated them only after an awkward pause. But there was no immediate danger. Olumba merely wanted them to stop for a short conference. He beckoned and the men reappeared, some of them from an unexpected hide-outs. 'We shall watch the Pond of Wagaba', Olumba said. 'We shall travel there by rafts and lie in ambush by the bank ... Quickly Olumba divided the men into three groups to man the three rafts. He knew who would work well with whom and he did not hesitate ... Olumba placed his men along the neck of water by which they thought the poachers (Aliakoro) would come. He repeated his instructions to his men and took up his position. (TGP,PP:11-12).

The above reveals Olumba's careful, calculating and orderly preparation for war. These factors account for his success. By contrast, Wago is blamed by his comrades for their defeat in the wars with Chiolu. He lacks organization and tact; he is selfish and tyrannic too:

> Wago, you have messed up this battle with your bad planning. You are a good fighter all right but you have no idea of organization. With better handling we should have captured many prisoners whose ransom would have brought us much money'.
>
> 'Well it is not my fault if you killed all the enemies who came your way', Wago retorted calmly. Think of Olumba's battle plans and you will realize you are nowhere He planned this fight to the last detail taking into account every possibility. The result is that we have suffered more than thrice their casualties. Many of my best fighters are dead or seriously wounded' 'And why didn't you help with the planning? It is easy to criticize you know. 'But you wouldn't let me put in a word ...' (TGP,P:49).

Aliakoro suffers heavy casualities and eventually loses the war, as a result of the tyranny, selfishness, poor organization and tactlessness of their leader.

Wago brings about social disorder. His suicide is a crime against the societies of Aliakoro and Chiolu. The rights of the group are

denied by a selfish individual in the person of Wago. Wago is like Okonkwo in Achebe's Things Fall Apart. He has broken tribal laws on a number of occasions, the major one being defiling the Ponds of Wagaba through his suicide. Like Okonkwo, Wago represents 'an individual asserting himself against tribal norms'[2]. Wago excercises his individuality at the expense of the society. Social convention demands he must be chastised.

The wars fought over the Great Ponds are aimed at winning the Ponds for either Chiolu or Aliakoro, and not for Olumba or Wago as individuals. Hence, the ramification of incidents is geared towards the clans success or failure rather than to individual glory or loss. This reveals Amadi's concern for Social Orderliness.

Ogbunabali, the god strongly believed in by Chiolu and Aliakoro, also brings about social disruption in the society. To Amadi, religion is an essential part of the life of the village community: 'In The Concubine and in The Great Ponds, religion is presented as an all-pervasive aspect of social, cultural and commercial life. Religion is both an important aspect of life and an essential quality of life without which man loses the protection of the god so vital for his survival'[3].

The people of Chiolu and Aliakoro are worn out by fighting over the fishing rights of the ponds of Wagaba: 'There is only one way out, the gods must decide' (TGP,P:84). Ogbunabali is the god called on by Aliakoro to settle the dispute between Aliakoro and Chiolu:

> 'We choose Ogbunabali, the god of the night'....
>
> Ogbunabali was one of the powerful gods in the Erekwi clan. There were shrines for it in some villages, but the shrine at Isiali was the biggest and the priest there was recognized as its chief priest. Ogbunabali had the peculiarity of Ali the earth-god, but he had a sombre reputation all his own (TGP,P.85).

Amadi demonstrates the religiosity of the Erekwi clan, which includes Chiolu and Aliakoro, in the episode where Olumba is to take an oath on behalf of Chiolu to decide who owns the Great Ponds. Both Chiolu and Aliakoro contribute towards the sacrifice necessary. The items for the sacrifice are 'just two black hens and some odd and ends' (TGP,P:85). The biggest shrine of Ogbunabali is at Isiali, where the priest goes for the swearing of the oath, which is to take place the next morning. Amadi describes the oath-taking ceremony before Ogunabali as follows:

> Early in the next morning the Ezes and elders trooped to the dark shrines of Ogbunabali the god of the night. An image of the god was unveiled after sacrifices, libation and lengthy incantations. Olumba stood before it naked but for a narrow strip of loin cloth. This was to make sure he carried no talismans or other charms that might fight the powers of the god. Then in a solemn voice he repeated after the priest 'I swear by Ogbunabali the god of the night that the pond of Wagaba belongs to Chiolu. 'If true, let me live and prosper'. The image of the god was waved around Olumba's head three times and the ceremony was over (TGP,PP:85-86).

Here is Olumba who has earlier said: 'I would rather face a whole village in battle than have the weakest of the gods after me', swearing by the god he knows very little of (TGP,P:9). He has no shrine for Ogbunabali among his shrines. Worse still, the issue of the rightful ownership of the Great Ponds is as hazy to him as the god he swears by. Here is Olumba's inner mind after taking the oath:

> The Pond of Wagaba - who were its rightful owners?... He tried to recall all he knew about the Great Ponds. He remembered Eze Diali's speech during negotiations with Aliakoro. The chief had said: 'Time obscures many things, but time also establishes many things. That you have proof enough that the, pond of Wagaba belongs to us. Olumba wondered whether Ogbunabali the god of the night would recognize this time factor. How did the gods reason

> anyway? True, they dispense justice impartially, but this impartiality was based on arguments which at times could be untenable from the human point of view (TGP,P:87).

The foregoing explains the nature of the relationship Olumba has with the god, Ogbunabali. He is caught in the web of a god who is 'invisible, elusive, woven into the fabric of time and space, nay woven into the very bodies of their worshippers, for one was born only at their pleasure, one worshipped them as long as one lived, and died when one had committed suicide an unpardonable offence against them'. (TGP,P:130). Ogbunabali, knowing his lordly position over man, exploits it to the detriment of man. Man explains his blessing and calamity to him. This is why when Olumba's first wife, Nyoma, is dying, Olumba strongly believes Ogunabali is behind it all:

> 'It is right Ogbunabali I am sure you are listening. Spare my wife, she is someone else's child. I alone swore. I alone should die if you so desire. Let her not suffer because she has chosen to be my wife; It is no crime to marry. He stood up to the door of Nyoma's room and shouted: 'Nyoma, lift your hands upwards to the Creator and declare your innocence. Let Amadioha, Ojukwu, Ali, Mini Wekwu and Ogbunabali himself hear it, let the heavens hear it, let men and spirits hear it'. (TGP,P.144).

Amadi establishes a hierarchy, with the god on top then nature and lastly man. Little wonder then the people of Chiolu and Aliakoro are helplessly struggling to survive Wonjo, an influenza believed to be ochestrated by the omnipotent Ogbunabali. Here is the authorial voice on the impact of Wonjo, on both Chiolu and Aliakoro societies: 'And so Wonjo, Ogbunabali's messenger, took its daily toll. Already one or two compounds had no survivors in them. Many more had a few wretched in mates whom fright had made subhuman'.(TGP,P:185). The dibias have their power on trust from the gods. As in The Concubine, in The Great Ponds even the dibias are manipulated by the whims and caprioes of the gods, in this case Ogbunabali. Like Anyika, the renowned dibia of Omokachi in The Concubine, Achichi, the dibia of Chiolu, loses credibility. His divination is dubious. According to one of his disappointed clients: 'His eyes are as good as mine when it comes to seeing spirits' (TGP,P:149).

Wonjo, the 1918 influenza, and the unclear vision of Achichi, the dibia are the handiwork of nature. Ogbunabali's power triumphs. He uses his might to allow both Chiolu and Aliakoro to suffer irresistible catastrophe. The domineering character of the god, Ogbunabali, is disruptive to social

order in the world of human beings.

As in The Concubine, the revelatory moment comes late in The Great Ponds. In the last chapter but one Chiolu learns through her 'search-team', that Aliakoro was also having her share of the influenza; only that Aliakoro calls the influenza Wonjo, a designation which Chiolu also adopts. Again, the last statement by Amadi in The Great Ponds reveals that 'Ogbunabali's disease' is nothing more than influenza: 'But it was only the beginning. Wonjo, as the villagers called the Great influenza of 1918, was to claim a grand total of some twenty million lives all over the world' (TGP,P.192). Only after both Chiolu and Aliakoro travel out of the confines of their community do they learn that Wonjo has afflicted both communities. The reader also learns late that it is the influenza at work not necessarily Ogbunabali, as the communities of Chiolu and Aliakoro allege.

Amadi is cynical about the 'untravelled' ideas of his people. Only when some people from Chiolu travel to Aliakoro are their eyes opened to the fact that Wonjo has afflicted other places as well. Chisa and Odo, Clumba's second wife, who are kidnapped and sold to Isiali, return after many years and inform

Chiolu that Isiali has become a ghost-town, as Wonjo has taken its highest toll there. Thanks to Wonjo, Chisa and Oda would never have returned: Oda narrates the story of their return thus:

> 'When we found ourselves alone, we walked home'...
> 'Our masters died. Those who were left were too sick and frightened to care about us. Chisa and I walked to the riverside and found many deserted boats. We boarded one and paddled across, you see we had learnt to paddle. We travelled early in the morning and late in the evening to avoid people but we soon found out that no one was interested in us'. 'How did you find the way?' (Olumba asked). 'From kind women we met on our way'. 'So Ogbunabali is working everywhere?' What a god!. Never before has a god harrassed the whole clan and beyond... 'They (Isialis) know Ogbunabali is responsible (TGP,PP.181-82).

Olumba's opinion of the god Ogbunabali is shared by all Chiolu and Aliakoro. Ogbunabali is thus responsible for a great deal of the social disorder in The Great Ponds. The failure of the contracts entered into by Chiolu and Aliakoro is attributed to his malevolent nature. Wago signs a contract with Aliakoro to lead Aliakoro to war over the Great Ponds. He ill-prepares his men for the war and causes Aliakoro to lose the ponds. He has thus broken the contract entered into with his village, Aliakoro. Wago extends his disruptive work to Chiolu by committing suicide in the Ponds of Wagaba which, by

the verdict of both gods (Ogbunabali) and man, now belongs to Chiolu since Olumba has survived the oath. Chiolu wins the verdict but is handicapped by the dictate of tradition not to fish in a 'contaminated' pond.

Wago's suicide has brought more complications to the societies of Chiolu and Aliakoro, making social orderliness hard to realise. Here are the Ezes' and the people's reactions to Wago's suicide:

> 'My lord, what frightened us most was the ghastly smile on the dead man's face'. 'But you say he is dead! ... The crowd gasped. 'He committed suicide, Diali said, gnashing his teeth.
> 'That is his business', Eliho said.
> 'And ours , Diali said, his face heavily lined with care.
> ''What do you mean?'
> 'This is terrible! Terrible', Diali cried in anguish ...
> 'It would be an abomination to fish in a pond in which someone committed suicide (TGP,PP:191-92).

Ironically, the Great Ponds lose their economic and social value at the end of the novel. The cruel hands of tradition which hold it an abomination to fish in a pond where someone has committed suicide render the ponds so. The gods will not be appeased over this.

Like Olumba, Eze Diali is not killed at the end of the novel. However, metaphorically speaking, he

is killed. He buries many of his relations and subjects and witnesses Chiolu crumble: 'For the first time since the war of the Great Ponds began, the chief lost control of himself. People watched him amazed' (TGP,P.191). As the chief of chiolu, Eze Diali's loss of control over himself and the people watching him in amazement spells death to the whole community.

The war of the Great Ponds and its attendant setbacks spell social chaos and the need to resolve it. The whole iden of fighting based on greed epitomizes a perenial Nigerian phenomenon. Amadi holds greed and selfishness responsible for chaos in the society. The Great Ponds is therefore a parable of the futility of war, the repercussion of which is social disorder.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE SLAVE*

Like the Concubine and The Great Ponds, The Slave, the last novel in Amadi's trilogy, presents the overriding importance of the society over the individual. In The Slave, Society is divided into the free-born and slaves. The factor responsible for putting Olumati, the hero of the novel, in the world of the Slaves is the traditional belief system of the Aliji. The fact that Olumati's father begets him when he is at the shrine of Amadioha automatically makes him a free-born at the shrine of Amadioha but an Osu or slave at Aliji. On the other hand, Aleru, Olumati's sister, is a full citizen of Aliji as she was born there:

> Osimini became a slave of Amadioha, an Osu, according to custom ... 'Before he fled to the shrine, Osimini had a daughter, Aleru. While at the shrine he had a son, Olumati. Now by custom this son is also a slave of Amadioha. He cannot be any where else except at Isiali where he is expected to serve at the shrine. (TS,P.25).

An individual is deemed free or not depending on where he was born and whether his ancestry can be traced four or more generations back. Aliji does not accept

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* Elechi Amadi, The Slave (CS), AWS, Heinemann, The Chancer Press Ltd. London (1978). All Page references are given after quotation in this work.

Olumati, constantly reminds him that he is an outcast in Aliji and finally gets rid of him.

The story thus revolves around Olumati, the tragic hero, a 'slave', after whom the novel takes its title. In The Slave, tradition and social pressure force the Echela family out of Aliji. The Echela family has had disputes with the Okani family when slave raiders swooped on Echela. The Echela hold Okani responsible for the raid as it was common to attribute one's misfortune to the enemy. However, divination clears Okani of the blame. Only Wakwakata, Olumati's grandfather, and a few members of Echela survive the raid. Aliji is shocked and makes another divination to trace the killers. The seer clears Aliji of any blame for the raid. After this, Wakwakata and other survivors disappear and come back to Aliji. After several years, the people of Aliji sympathise with them and help resettle them:
'Suddenly for reasons no one knew, the few members of Echela who had returned began to sicken and die fast. Wakwakata died later leaving behind his wife Nyege and son, Osimini' (TS, P.24). The fear of death forces Osimini to flee to the shrine of Amadioha at Isiali for protection. At Isiali he begets Olumati. The Echela family holds the Okani family responsible for all the misfortune which befalls them; the Okani

family also holds the Echela responsible for the misfortune of Okani:

> Whatever befell one family is blamed on the other. For instance when Wakwakata won the championship of the Erekwi clan, Okani was said to have accused him of having used the soul of a member of their family, a little girl who died at about the same time, as a sacrifice in pursuit of his ambition' (TS, P.24).

Besides the land disputes, there is also rivalry in love. Kwele, the oldest man in Aliji, was the rival of Wakwakata over Nyege, Olumati's grand mother. Against this background, Olumati, the grandson of the late village wrestling champion, Wakwakata, returns to Aliji from the shrine of Amadioha to reclaim his inheritance left him by his father:

> 'Many years ago, slave raiders swooped on Echela village one rainy night and carried off many members of that family ... Only Wakwakata, the spider, then the champion wrestler survived the raid. Aliji was shocked and tried to trace the killers. The seer said clearly that the raiders were not from Aliji. After this divination, Wakwakata and other survivors disappeared. For over seven years no member of the family was seen. Their house fell and their farm-lands reverted to jungle except those bits that were farmed by their neigh-bours' (TS,P.24).

Olumati works hard to make a living and win recogni-tion through palm-wine tapping, animal trapping and wrestling. His success is guided largely by the

devotion of his sister, Aleru, the constant and selfless help of his intimate friend and teacher, Nyeche , and his secret ambition to succeed and marry Enaa. Enaa is the village beauty, whose Mgbede, the traditional seclusion for Erekwi girls who have reached puberty in preparation for marriage, runs through a good part of the novel. Olumati builds a house through community effort. He accumulates enough money to enable him to marry a wife. In addition, he beats Aso, the village champion, in a fierce wrestling contest. Olumati loses his grandmother, Nyege, and his sister Aleru, who dies during her first pregnancy. Sorrow devastates him and his brother in-law, Nyeche. Wizo, the village carver, becomes a close friend, confidante, and mentor of Olumati. The last straw that breaks Olumati's back is Wizo's secret love for and marriage to Enaa which he shockingly witnesses on the occasion of Enaa's Mgbede outing. Heart-broken and disconsolate, Olumati gives up the struggle in Aliji and flees back to Isiali to take refuge at the shrine of Amadioha.

The tragedy is more poignant in its effect on Olumati and his family. Their hopes and aspirations are shattered. Like The Concubine and The Great Ponds, The Slave deals with birth, marriage and death. These customary rites of passage create

anxiety and tension for Olumati and the Aliji society.

Nyege, Olumati's grandmother, tries to explain and convince Eze Minikwe and other elders of Aliji that Olumati is not a slave in Aliji society. According to her, Ndem was about three months pregnant when she went to the shrine of Amadioha, and gave birth to Olumati six months later. Besides, Nyege had spoken to the priest of Amadioha at Isiali about whether or not Olumati was free to go, and he cleared Olumati. In her words: 'When Osimini ran to the shrine of Amadioha for protection, his wife, Ndem was already pregnant. Olumati was born six months later. So, Olumati does not belong to Amadioha. Before I brought him here, I spoke with the priest at Isiali and he said Olumati was free to go' (TS,P.25). Aliji society values its collective conscience and prays that the bird that would perch alone should suffer a broken wing' (TS,P.25). Eze Minikwe convenes a meeting of the elders to decide whether or not Olumati should remain in Aliji. It is a sensitive issue, so Minikwe reminds the council of the elders of the need for justice. According to Eze Minikwe, 'The survival of Aliji may well depend on what we decide here today' (TS, P.23). The council gives both Nyege and kwele a fair chance to state what they know about Olumati's

birth before the council of elders. After the hearing, the council asks Nyege to excuse them for a while in order to put their thoughts together before giving their verdict. Nyege is to come back after eight days, after which the priest of Amadioha will be contacted on the issue. When the council reconvenes, the messengers inform the council that the priest of Amadioha says that, 'Amadioha does not take what does not belong to him' (TS,P.27). The elders are placed in a difficulty. Only a seer can interprete the priest's words. Ajohia, the seer, is consulted and he says that Olumati does not belong to Amadioha, so he can stay on in Aliji. Based on this, the council allows Olumati to remain in Aliji.

The elders' verdict on the issue surrounding Olumati's birth generates controversy in Aliji. Nyege is happy that her grandson has been allowed to stay in Aliji and the young men see him as a useful addition to their wrestling team. However, 'for Eze Minikwe Olumati's return was a source of uneasiness' (TS,P.28). In fact, most members of Aliji have their misgivings about Olumati's presence in their society as they still regard him as a slave. Adiba, articulates the people's stand regarding Olumati: "Many in Aliji are still not

sure you are not a slave of Amadioha. I know you are not a slave of Amadioha but people are stubborn" (TS,P.156). Eze Minikwe has to tactfully and carefully establish Olumati's place in the society, and to be very careful in the course of settling Olumati in Aliji.

Land is another delicate issue Minikwe has to handle in the process of helping Olumati to adjust in Aliji; 'For Echela's neighbours nibbled at, then later swallowed, its farmlands. Only the land surrounding the ruins of their compounds was left intact. The graves strewn all over the ruins and kept the interloper off' (TS, P.28). The delicacy of the land issue causes Eze Minikwe to call and advise Olumati on how to find his feet in Aliji society:

> After so many years it will not be easy for those who have been farming on your family land to let go; but I shall help you when the time comes. Listen well. A newly bought chicken stands cautiously on one leg to begin with. You should do the same. Do not hope to recover all what is yours in a day or two or even in a year or two. If you rush you will find things difficult. You should like hot soup slowly from the sides. I hold the symbol of Owhonogwu. I am also the priest of Ali. I cannot take what is not mine. I would not last a day if I did. Tomorrow I shall take you to Izije which belongs to your family. It is a small piece of land but very productive. I have no desire to hold Izije. Come with your sister and anyone you may wish to invite. That is what I called you for ...'

'You have a friend in my son,
Nyeche. You do not have to
feel lonely' (TS,P.30).

Olumati has to gradually get himself accepted by the society; it is not the society that has to adjust to accept him. Olumati is the newly bought chicken, and therefore needs time and the help of other members of the new community in which he finds himself in order to settle down.

The tact required of Eze Minikwe displays the importance of the society over the individual. The Eze's advice demands from Olumati 'obedience to an unwritten moral code, an agreement to a decorum in behaviour' as vital ingredients in his orientation in Aliji[1]. The Eze's sense of wholeness, his morality and fair play are derived from 'a world whose beauty lies partly in the fact that it is, at peace with its conscience'[2].

The first test for Olumati over the land issue is given by Aso, the grandson of kwele and a man of Okani, the enemy family to Echela's family. Aso knots some palm leaves to 'lock the land with charms' so that Olumati should not be able to farm that piece of land the following year, as he intends to do (TS,P.99). Olumati

takes a bottle of gin to Eze Minikwe to discuss the issue with him. Again, the Eze assembles the elders, who try the case in all fairness. Aso is required to swear the land belongs to him. Aso refuses to swear the oath, a fact which indicates the land does not belong to him. The land is thus given to Olumati by the elders to cultivate. The dispensation of justice, while another test for Eze Minikwe, shows Olumati abiding by the set code of settling land issues in Aliji.

The circumstances surrounding Olumati's birth generate another crisis in the marriage plans of the protagonists. Eze Minikwe discourages his son, Nyeche, from marrying Aleru, owing to the myth surrounding the Echéla family. The myth holds that the Echela family is responsible for the disappearance of the Coral heads in the shrine of Ali. This is why Ali is taking vengeance on the Echela by trying to wipe the Echela family from Aliji, which explains why the family is scattered and most of them dead. Minikwe explains to Nyeche how his five sons died in succession before any of them had reached the age of seven. This misfortune is attributed to the anger of Ali, one of their gods, against Minikwe. Minikwe has married the daughter of a

man who has shed the blood of a clansman, though by accident. This is an abomination against the god of the earth and he pays dearly with the lives of his sons. Minikwe does not want Nyeche to make the same mistake as he made. As the possible heir to the throne of Aliji, Minikwe reminds Nyeche of the marriage code of Aliji:

> There was the matter of choosing a wife. A priest of Ali could not marry just anyone. The community had to ensure that the priest's wife had the necessary family background. She had to come from a family that was not in any way linked with deformity, crime or insanity. Moreover, her parents and grandparents had to be natives of Aliji (TL,P.74).

Nyeche's insistence on marrying from a doubtful family defies the social ethic of Aliji. Little wonder, Aleru aborts and dies during her first pregnancy, a kind of vindication for the voice of tradition. This upholds the group concience which Nyeche defies. Aleru is not qualified to be the wife of Nyeche, the heir-apparent. Nyeche insists on marrying Aleru. When Minikwe sees that Nyeche is not prepared to heed his advice not to marry Aleru, he decides to pour libation and offer sacrifices to Ali to cleanse Aleru from any blemish. Aleru's family has been accused of stealing some coral beads from

the shrine of Amadioha, a sacrilegous act. As negotiations begin, Olumati plays the dual role of mother and father to Aleru as they have no biological parents in Aliji. Nyeche and Aleru are finally married.

Enaa's marriage to Wizo, a shocking note on which the novel ends, is another crisis that creates tension for Olumati. In fact, this is the last straw that breaks Olumati and forces him back to the shrine of Amadioha. But for the circumstances surrounding Olumati's birth, he would have had relatives to help him get Enaa's hand in marriage. Olumati procrastinates and ends up not proposing to Enaa despite pressure from his sister, Aleru. His procrastination indicates the inhibition's imposed by the society upon the individual. To propose to Enaa on his own would mean violating the marriage custom of Aliji which sees marriage as a social arrangement between families and not individuals.

Death is the third crisis - generating event in the novel. It is an off shoot of the circumstances surrounding Olumati's birth. Nyege's is the first death to occur in The Slave. Nyege's logical presentation and proof that Olumati is not a slave have enabled the council to decide

in favour of Olumati. Nyege enables Olumati to learn about what happened to their family. Through her, Olumati learns of enemy and friendly families in Aliji. Explaining why Wakwakata, Olumati's grandfather, ran away Nyege says: 'He was afraid he would die .... To see people around you die rapidly without any reason is frightening' (TS. P.33). Nyege is the link between Olumati and Echela. According to Ovunda, the head of the Osa family, one of the friendly families, 'Nyege has done her best. Many a woman would have ran away and there would have been no Echela to talk of' (TS,P.36). Besides, Nyege always prays to Amadioha to protect Olumati. Thus, Nyege means much to Olumati, which is why Nyege's death causes Olumati so much grief. Aleru also feels the impact of Nyege's death very strongly. Aleru cannot sleep in the house alone after Nyege's death. Aleru's fears are compounded by 'Okani's deepening hatred' for the Echela family, so, at night she shares Olumati's new house (TS,P.88). 'Nyege's death focused the attention of Aliji community on Olumati and Aleru' (TS,P.89). While Minikwe, Nyeche and a few other members of Aliji become very helpful to Aleru and Olumati, Aso and the other members of

Okani see the absence of Nyege as an opportunity to eliminate the Echola family from Aliji: 'Certain members of that (Okani) family dressed in new wrappers to the market soon after Nyege's death. Okani took precautions to ensure that Nyege's spirit did no havoc ... Aleru and Olumati would wake up in the morning to find sacrificies all over their compound' (TS, PP 88-89). This implacability by the Okani is strange in Aliji as 'quarelling families always draw the line at death' (TS, P.88). With this uneasy atmosphere, Olumati misses the shrine of Amadioha where he was brought up: The shrine of Amadioha, 'the miniature temple would not only protect him but also cure his mostalgia' (TS, PP. 85-86). The death of Nyege, thus creates enxiety and tension for Olumati and Aleru, whom the bulk of Aliji seeks to flush out, and makes them both insecure in Aliji.

Aleru's death brings about another crisis for Olumati. Aleru has been like a mother, father and friend to Olumati. She is the link between Olumati and Enaa, Adiba, Nyeche and Wizo. In fact, her death is partly traceable to the hardwork she does on Olumati's farm in order that Olumati may not be wanting when she has her baby. Olumati is hard-hit by Aleru's death: 'Olumati was speechless

and numb. He did not weep aloud but tears ran down his face in a continuous trickle. Wizo and Oriji held him ... His eyes were closed and for some time he was not aware of his mother's presence' (TS, PP.138-39). Olumati's recovery is very slow. Aleru's memory and presence are vivid in his mind. He thinks of getting a dibia to get rid of her from his mind. No dibia can do this. Such is the impact of death on Olumati that his mental stability is disturbed. Thus, death upsets social order. Like Madume in The Concubine, and Wago in The Great Ponds, Aso is greedy and selfish. He is an impulsive character who plunges himself into a cause he is not quite sure of. For instance, his act of putting a charm on the land to prevent Olumati from cultivating it means that henceforth the land will belong to Aso and that Olumati will have no right to farm on it. Olumati is disturbed as he does not know who has locked the land. Olumati seeks the help of Eze Minikwe, who employs the services of the town crier to fish out whoever has locked the farm. Before nightfall, Minikwe sends word to Olumati that Aso has owned up. A date is set for the settlement of the land dispute: 'There was only one way to resolve the matter: Someone had

to swear an oath' (TS, P.99). Both of them know the risk of taking a false oath. Olumati declines to swear as he is new in Aliji. Aso hesitates and seeks the permission of the elders to go and consult with his father before swearing. Aso returns with the reply that, 'my father has agreed to remove the palm leaves by tomorrow morning' (TS, P.99). This indicates that Aso has no rightful claim over the piece of land he has locked. The elders blame Aso for locking the land without being sure of the consequence of his action. Aso ought to have consulted his father before taking action on the land. Aso's action is a deviant behaviour, 'a behaviour that violates patterned expectation'[3]. Olumati is authorised to use the land. Olumati is grateful to the elders for their wisdom and to Nyeche for advising him to take the land case to the elders.

Olumati's orderly approach thus yields better results than fighting. This orderly approach to problems fosters social cohesion in the community. Aso has taken the law into his hands and violated the social norms of Aliji. Aso had earlier, through his impulsive character, violated custom when he twists Enaa's hand in a bid to force her

to accept his hand in marriage, and breaks her Mgbede pot when she refuses and makes fun of him:

> Aso moved nearer and held her hand.
> She resisted mildly but when he held her
> firmly she stopped struggling.
> 'You will break my arm ...'
> Aso was not amused.
> 'Enna you will marry me say yes'
> 'Let me go'.
> 'Say yes, please, Enaa'...
> 'Whom will you marry, you
> Stupid girl? Can't you recognize
> a good thing?
> Well, we are together in this
> village. I shall not die today or
> tomorrow. I shall see that paragon
> of yours '...
> Enaa took the music pot and
> curdled it on her lap...
> 'Put away that thing or I shall
> break it'.
> Enaa continued. Aso snatched it
> from her and tossed it to a
> corner. Its neck broke (TS, PP.96-97).

Aso is a good wrestler. He has no rival in and around Aliji. obsessed by his victories in wrestling, Aso boasts and challenges anyone to a fight. Olumati accepts the challenge and defeats him; the first defeat Aso has ever suffered: 'He lifted his opponent up to shoulder level and before the referees could intervene, flung him to the ground. Aso's back hit the ground with a thud' (TS, P.111). Aso gets seriously ill as a result of this fight and wishes Olumati had never existed Aso restrains himself from committing suicide. When he finally recovers, he limps and develops a hunchback. Aso's wrestling career is ruined. He is physically maimed and

morally weak to face his society. Aso's physical and mental breakdown are the punishment he gets for his boastfulness in challenging Olumati to a fight, and rash actions in locking the farmland against Olumati.

Kwele, Aso's grandfather and the head of the Okani family, is another agent of social disruption in The Slave. He had vied for Nyege's hand in marriage and lost to Wakwakata, Olumati's grandfather. He bears Nyege and her family a grudge. An instance of his hatred for the Echela family is manifested in the court scene over the issue of Olumati's birth. When Nyege is still explaining to the council of elders why she thinks Olumati should be allowed to stay in Aliji. Kwele catches Minikwe's eye, indicating that he has something pressing to say. Minikwe gives him a chance. Kwele stresses the urgency and need 'to remind all present that we are here to decide whether Olumati should be allowed to stay with us. We have not come to recount the misfortunes of families who may have offended the gods in ways we may not know' (TS, P.26). Kwele's remark offends Nyege, who rains abuses on Kwele. Kwele turns to fight Nyege but for the prompt intervention of the elders, Kwele is allowed to continue and adds that:

> 'It is natural for people to blame others for their misfortunes. The woman who finds labour difficult accuses her husband's other wives of witchcraft. The truth is the gods never forget. The ivory tusks and the corals in the shrine of Ali vanished many many years ago - we were children then. Ali has not forgotten' (TS, PP.26-27).

Nyege interrupts and demands to know what kwele is trying to insinuate. Kwele tells Nyege that the coral beads were stolen by someone 'the god knows' (TS, P.27). Minikwe warns Kwele to be careful of saying what he is not sure of: 'You know nothing of the treasures at the shrine of Ali. It is unwise to speak about things you don't know' (TS, P.27). Minikwe regrets letting Kwele speak. Through his impulsive character, Kwele earns the disrespect of the elders, who see Kwele's words as 'adding pepper to a soothing balm' (TS, P.26). Kwele's interruption, his lack of self-discipline and self-respect, disrupt the meeting of the elders, who ask Nyege to come back after eight days for their judgement. Kwele thus forfeits his chance of concluding his testimony. This indicates that 'social location involves our being as well as our conduct' and that the power of the society is more than Kwele has so far asserted[4].

Nyege is another character who disrupts society in The Slave. Nyege, the oldest woman in Aliji, the wife of Wakwakata, is a special woman in Aliji. She is entitled to Cola, and drinks 'wine with the

eagle feathers' before the elders (TS, P.22). This is a privilege which only special men and women in Aliji enjoy. Nyege gets this honour not only because of her old age but because she once killed a man from another clan to protect her husband. She is the only member of the Echela family who would not run away from Aliji as the other members had done because of traditional and social pressures. These qualities notwithstanding, Nyege has a sharp tongue and is highly suspicious of everybody who does not come from the Echela family. She almost gives the elders another case to sit on when, in reacting to Kwele's insinuations, she calls him a murderer:

> 'Do you hear him?' Nyege screamed. 'Do you hear the murderer? Who has offended the gods, the murderer or his victims? 'Quiet Nyege. You have bad your say (Minikwe warned). 'I can't keep quiet while he says such abominable things'. 'Elders you have heard her accuse me of murder', Kwele said.
>
> 'I have to summon her before you to prove it. Minikwe, here are two manillas for the summons fee'. 'Hold it, hold it', Minikwe said. 'We would be adding pepper to a soothing balm. You don't trade words with a woman'. 'I cant overlook such accusations from anybody. Take the money'. Other elders helped in persuading Kwele to stay action ... 'You must ignore the rantings of a woman. What they lack in strength they make up in words'(TS, P.26).

But for the intervention of the elders, she would have

been sued because of her wagging tongue if she had been asked to prove Kwele a murderer and had failed. Nyege invites the contempt and disrespect of the elders who shout her down. Like Kwele, she angers the elders. She has caused a diversion in the meeting and brings the meeting to a sudden end. Control over one's tongue, tact and diplomacy are vital ingredients in such deliberations and ensure social order.

Another instance of Nyege's sharp tongue and impetuosity is demonstrated when she hears a knock on her door while she is recounting the history of the Echela family to Olumati. Without knowing who it is she curses:

> 'Tufia! Let your witchcraft stick to your body'. Olumati rose to open the door. 'Sit down! Nyege ordered. Another knock.
> 'Knock down your entire family...'
> 'Nyege are you well?' A voice asked.
> 'He who pursues an innocent chicken is bound to stumble. 'That is what I say too', the voice replied.
> 'Who are you?'
> 'Ovunda'.
> 'Ovunda'.
> 'Mm.
> 'What do you want so late?
> 'Can't you let an old woman rest?
> You have killed my husband
> Wakwakata and the rest of the family.
> Have you come to finish me off ?'
> 'Open, Nyege. I am not equal to your talking this night (TS, P.35).

The abuse thus rained on Ovunda could have earned Nyege

serious punishment if taken before the elders. The patience and calmness exhibited by Ovunda are essential to arrest a rather chaotic situation.

Nyeche, the son of Eze Minikwe, the heir to the throne of Aliji, is a good friend of Olumati. They are brought together by Eze Minikwe. Nyeche helps Olumati find his way in Aliji and meet people:

> True to his promise, Nyeche was helping Olumati find his way about in Aliji. He had taken him to Izije and other farmlands, to the marshes and to the waterside market. He had introduced him to a number of people in Aliji, giving him hints of any outstanding traits in their characters (TS, PP.40-41).

Nyeche teaches Olumati animal trapping and wine tapping. He advises Olumati on what to do in critical moments, as when Aso locks the piece of land Olumati is to farm. Nyeche advises him not to fight with Aso but to ask the elders to settle the case. As a faithful friend, Nyeche always stands by Olumati such as when he loses both Nyege and Aleru through death. These fine attributes notwithstanding, as the son of the Eze, Nyeche flouts the custom and tradition of Aliji when he chooses his own bride, Aleru, and persuades his initially unyielding father to accept his choice. Nyeche's approach to marriage violates

the conjugal order of Aliji. It is a break with tradition, which holds marriage a family arrangement not the individual's concerned. Like Ekwueme in The Concubine, his insistence on marrying Aleru despite all opposition indicates an individual shaking loose from the strangle-hold of tradition and asserting his individuality. But unlike Ekwueme, who loses his life, Nyeche loses his wife and child. Aleru's misfortune derives from Nyeche's obstinacy. A child who disregards the voice of his parents, the voice of tradition, is always overtaken by tragedy, such as Nyeche faces.

Enaa, the village beauty, is endowed with many mental and physical qualities. These are factors that generate rivalry among men for her hand in marriage. For instance, Aso fights Olumati first in Wizo's workshop and again in the wrestling arena of Aliji. Through her Mgbede, the reader learns more of Aso's impulsive character, Olumati's cowardly character and Wizo's excellence in carving. She is a good friend of Aleru, who would not mind marrying Olumati to please Aleru. Thus, she is the cause of Aso's uneasiness with both Aleru and Olumati. Nevertheless, like Ekwueme in The Concubine and Nyeche, Enaa's refusal to accept a man's hand before going into Mgbede, breaks the pattern of courtship in Aliji. Bekweri, Enaa's father, explains this clearly: 'You

know most husbands enjoy sharing the burden of Mgbede with their in-laws. Not that I want anybody's help, but it is the usual practice' (TS,P.39). Enaa also makes fun of Aso's offer of marriage and says that, "It is true that marriage is an affair between families, but that time is past when the man and woman involved were not expected to have a say" (TS, P. 95). By this statement, Enaa, like Nyeche, is challenging the right of tradition and custom to impose a husband on a girl. She struggles to free herself from the stranglehold of custom. Very impressed with Wizo's carvings and extravagant gifts, she accepts him as a husband during her Mgbede outing. This is the note on which the novel ends. The event shocks both Olumati and the people of Aliji. It is the frustrating factor that drives Olumati back to the shrine of Amadioha in Isiali.

Although Olumati has not proposed to Enaa, he is equally shocked by Wizo's action. His 'good' friend never hinted his intention to marry Enaa, as Amadi recounts:

> When she saw herself so well portrayed in wood her eyes grew misty . Wizo danced toward her and embraced her. The crowd cheered. When Wizo sat down at last Olumati could no longer contain himself.

'Wizo', he said, 'are you distantly related to Bekweri family?'
'Mm-mm. Why?'
'You have done so much today, almost as much as Bekweri himself'.
'No, I am not related to them but I shall soon be'.
'How?'
Wizo smiled.
'I am sorry I have not told you yet. Everything has been in such a rush'.
'Told me what?'
'A few markets ago, Enaa agreed to marry me. From that moment till now I haven't rested...'
Olumati was no longer listening. He felt hollow ... With clenched teeth, Olumati rose to go.
'Listen (To Adiba) there is no reason why your brother can't marry Enaa or anyone else, but why was he so secretive about it?' (TS, P.155).

The shock Wizo gives Olumati finally causes him to lose faith in man and his society. The alternative for him is to seek solace in the shrine of his father, Amadioha, who will never forsake him: "How different this place was from the shrine where he had known peace. There, fighting and injustice were unknown" (TS, P.36).

Though a good carver, who would offer all his talents freely to the service of Aliji, Wizo is responsible for bringing about disharmony in his society. His insincerity to Olumati has caused tension for Olumati in particular and Aliji in general. Olumati's disappearance to the shrine of Amadioha leaves the people of Aliji at the end of the

novel tense and uneasy, and challenges them to re-examine their classification of people into the free-born and slaves. The elders have become more uneasy and confused about their belief system. A lot of questions remain unanswered, which they believe Amadioha will take care of. Amadi is cynical about their narrow-mindedness, and holds that destruction may result even from those actions we believe to be good:

> The issues of right and wrong of simple moral judgements on individuals or even simpler explanations in terms of social or historical pressures resolve themselves again into the living tensions of the people who endure them... Issues of good and bad are abstractions which men employ to justify their own ponderous swings from excess to excess[5].

Rigid social conventions, with the hazy religious rituals lodged behind them, serve as mutants of social harmony in The Slave. Unlike in Achebe's village, Umuofia, in Things Fall Apart, which has a wide highway to 'fame open to all who have the will and the ambition to work hard', Amadi's village, Aliji, denies Olumati such a priviledge despite his efforts and successes[6]. Here, Amadi illustrates the difficult task of settling in a new community. By convention Olumati is a slave of Amadioha: 'He cannot be anywhere else except at Isiali

where he is expected to serve at the shrine' (TS, P.25). Olumati returns to where he came from. Convention is also against drawing blood during a duel with a clansman. The feeling that the community shared a common parentage had much to do with that: 'It was no good hurting your brother seriously since you would share the burden of looking after him' (TS, P.45). This explains why Olumati's happiness after his victory over Aso is short-lived. Aso's ill-health and the consequent hunchback he develops makes Olumati uncomfortable throughout his life. Olumati seeks Minikwe's help to pour libation's on his behalf to beg the god to spare Aso's life, for if Aso dies, Olumati will be required to carry out certain expensive rites to wash Aso's blood off him. Custom also requires that 'he offers Ali, the earth-god, something if Aso survives' (TS, P.116). By convention, the task of choosing a husband rests with the parents rather than with the individuals concerned. Convention has thus spelt the operative code for the people of Aliji and serves as a basis for ensuring fair play.

Olumati's flight to the shrine of Amadioha and the people's resignation to the god's wisdom in issues they are afraid to tackle are escapist

stances. Such pseudo-solutions do not restore order. Amadi thus exposes the inadequacies with which man confronts the world he claims to rule. Tranquility can only be achieved when man faces the reality of living by clearing the misconceptions about his social reality, a challenge for the people of Aliji in particular and the world at large.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

The dissertation attempts to show that social order is of paramount importance, in Amadi's estimate, to nation-building. In his trilogy, Amadi looks at the traditional social system of his people. He tries to suggest ways of forging social order through harmonious cooperation by presenting the characters and episodes, in each case, highlighting their deviant traits. The contradictions he exposes are manifestations of the problems and efforts of a people to create a viable culture to enable them to survive and function in their society. Amadi proves that order is enforced through authority. He sees a need for a check and balance of power in any given society. This is why he records the social institutions of Ikwerre society in their hierarchical gradation, from the Eze to the ordinary citizens. Amadi also mirrors the group activities of the people: hunting, fishing, farming, building, renovating houses, participating in Mgbede ceremonies and a host of other social engagements. All these activities have physical and spiritual dimensions and engender communal solidarity.

Amadi traces the problems of a given society to the individual members of that society. He places the good ones side by side with the bad ones. Ihuoma, Olumba and Olumati are examples of good characters; while Madume, Wago and Aso are embodiments of the bad eggs in the society. Paradoxically, while the society flushes out social deviants, it also ejects social conformists. Madume and Wago die abominable deaths and Aso earns the contempt and disrespect of the people of Aliji and is also maimed for life. Ihuoma, Olumba and Olumati do not die physically, but are metaphorically dead. The fear of the dying and the dead reduces them to a sub-human, level. Olumba degenerates physically, mentally and spiritually from being the strong personality, the leader of men, that we find at the beginning of The Great Ponds, to a mere instrument in the hands of fate, a man tormented by doubts and uncertainties about his own safety and that of his family and community'[1]. Similarly, Olumati flees Aliji as a result of his disillusionment with the pettiness of human beings. The frustration suffered by the social conformists leaves a puzzle for the society to solve, challenges its moral standards 'and entices it to depart from automatic reliance on precedent and tradition'[2].

Amadi envisages selflessness, love, level-headedness and mutual cooperation as means of stabilising society. These lessons are made plausible through Amadi's contrastive appraisal of characters and episodes in the trilogy. In The Concubine, Madume's 'big-eye' is contrasted with the selfless qualities of Ihuoma. In The Great Ponds, Olumba's christ-like qualities are put side by side with the satanic character of Wago. Similarly, in The Slave, Aso's destructive tendencies are contrasted with the constructive qualities of Olumati. Amadi also establishes that fighting, an off-shoot of greed, disrupts social harmony, as the fights presented by Amadi in the parallel episodes that run through the novels show: Madume's fight with Emenike over a piece of land in The Concubine, Chiolu's fight with Aliakoro over the Great Ponds in The Great Ponds, and Aso's fight with Olumati in The Slave. Madume loses the land to Emenike, both Chiolu and Aliakoro lose the Great Ponds, and Aso loses the land to Olumati. The losers in each case are greedy, grafty and bestial in their bid to strip the other permanently of the item of contention. The procedure of settling each of the cases by appealing to duly constituted authority reflects some form of social order. The deaths

of Emenike, Madume, and Ekwueme in The Concubine, the many lives lost through greedy fighting and Wonjo in The Great Ponds, and Olumati's disappearance in The Slave bring about gloom in the novels and also have social and economic setbacks. In The Concubine, Madume's loss of the land has economic repercussions. In The Great Ponds, Wago's suicide in the Ponds contaminates and renders the Ponds unfit for fishing. Both Chiolu and Aliakore lose as the Ponds have been their major source of economic survival. Aso's loss of land to Olumati undermines Aso's economic position in The Slave. The irony behind the loss of land and of the Great Ponds is that human beings accept reason, love and selflessness only when they are driven to the wall.

Social conventions should be firm but flexible for social cohesion. Customs regarding births, marriages, deaths ensure social stability. However, rigid adherence to tradition brings social disharmony. The aspect of social convention which encourages communal activities like farming, fishing, wrestling and other such social activities in The Concubine, the settlement of cases through oath taking and sampling of people's opinions as evidenced in The Great Ponds and The Slave, foster

unity. On the other hand, rigid social conventions may stipulate one's birth right and affect one's participation in important social discussions, taking titles and even marrying from a particular family. Olumati is a victim of this practice, as his place of birth in the shrine of Amadioha automatically draws a line between him and the 'free-born'. Custom, which holds that 'a child who washes his hands well can eat with the elders', contradicts itself by ejecting Olumati out of Aliji despite his efforts and successes in many social engagements such as farming and wrestling[3]. Convention renders the Ponds of Wagaba unfit for fishing as it upholds that Wago's suicide in the Ponds defiles it. On the issue of marriage, social convention decries individual arrangements. Ekwueme in The Concubine and Nyeche in The Slave, who insist on choosing their own brides pay either with their lives or the lives of their closest relatives. Convention brings down any individual who asserts himself above it. Thus, social conventions direct and constrain the conscience and behaviour pattern of the people in the society.

Amadi assumes a marxist stance towards religion. Religion has failed to bind the people of Ikwerre together, and only mystifies the society. He

reiterates Jones' belief that religion can only be meaningful to a people if it makes them balanced human beings physically, mentally and spiritually. The people's firm hold on the verdict of their gods is synonymous with their survival. In The Concubine when Ekwueme goes insane because of the love potion administered by Ahurole to him, Adaku, Ekwueme's mother prays: 'Oh' Amadioha, please help our son!'[4] In The Great Ponds, Amadi reposes the confidence of the people of Ikwerre in the gods, whom Olumba believes 'no sacrifices were too great to placate', not even 'the most insignificant of the household gods'[5]. In The Slave, Eze Minikwe instructs Olumati on how to settle down in Aliji, and rounds up his instruction's with the statement: 'Amadioha and Ali will do the rest'[6]. This relationship shows dependency. The fear of the gods causes confusion for the society, especially with the unanswered questions that persist in the novels: Why Ihuoma should remain the Sea-king's concubine, why the ownership of the Great Ponds is not established and why the person who steals the coral beads from the shrine of Amadioha is never discovered. Every answer is speculative: 'The gods are uncanny, implacable and ubiquitous'[7]. There is no higher authority to balance their power. The gods thus meddle freely

in the affairs of human beings, exposing their malignant nature by crushing all progressive forces along with the retrogressive ones. This is a case of abuse of power by the gods, thus invalidating religion and contradicting functionalism which espouses religion as an agent of social integration.

Amadi's treatment of religion differs from Achebe's in that, whereas Achebe blames foreign religions for the collapse of traditional society, Amadi shows things falling apart in Ikwerre society without foreign intervention. The absence of foreign religion does not help the Ikwerre people out of the maze surrounding many traditional issues. For Amadi, whether traditional or foreign, religion can be totally devastating to a community; it is thus an opium of the opiate', as Marx puts it[8]. Olumba and Olumati in The Great Ponds and The Slave, respectively, exhibit unquestioning allegiance to the gods but end up frustrated. Amadi thus proves that even traditional religion fails to provide solace to those who subscribe to it. Religion does not necessarily need a clash with another religion to expose its limitations. Amadi's assertion negates Achebe's view, expressed in Things Fall Apart, that the collapse of traditional society is

due to a clash between traditional and foreign religions. That the society crashes in the end invalidates the social system of Ikwerre society and calls for a modification of its codes of conduct.

The late revelatory moments in the trilogy are a pointer to the complexity and illusory nature of life. In The Concubine, when he is dying, Madume learns through a dibia's divination that the spitting cobra which made him blind is an agent of vengeance from the god, the Sea-king . In The Great Ponds, Olumba and Chiolu learn that the gory deaths towards the close of the novel are caused by Wɔnjo. Similarly, in The Slave, Olumati's flight to the shrine of Amadioha is an indication of the shattered hopes and beliefs of the Ikwerre people.

The overall impression we get from Amadi's novels is that we need to live in mutual cooperation with one another for social harmony. Amadi diagnoses the flaws in the characters of the people who make the society as a cause of its disintegration. Amadi also establishes that a society's 'narrow codes of conventional behaviour cause eccentric departures from them'[9]. These impressions

of Amadi's work nullify the claim made by Innes and Lindfors and Roscoe that Amadi is still on the queue waiting for recognition as a committed writer. Amadi uses literature as a means to propagate social change from the restricted and hazy societal codes of conduct, which typify Ikwerre society, to the 'travelled', objective and balanced codes of conduct which will serve as a panaceae for social orderliness.

Thus, in the novels, Amadi does not deal with an ideal society in which social order has been attained. Rather he presents a struggling society in its bid to accomplish social change. Social change is not a smooth, orderly progression but riddled with contradictions, tension and conflict built into the system. Hence, Amadi focuses on a society that is in need of social transformation and uses Literature to propagate the need for such social transformation in a conservative society that is very repressive.

FOOT-NOTES

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