

CULTURAL NATIONALISM IN AMADI'S THE SLAVE AND THE CONCUBINE

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ABSTRACT

Amadi has been an advocate of cultural nationalism. In the Slave and The Concubine, we find Amadi showcasing the beauty of the African society. The books are replete with African Culture. He captures all facets of the society: the marriage system, wrestling, African communalism, African ethos, societal mores, norms just to mention but a few. These are dramatized to the consternation of even the doubting Thomases, the white men who had shown Africa in pejorative light. Amadi has actually right the wrongs which the whites have erroneously written about Africa over the years.

Introduction

Amadi like his predecessor, Chinua Achebe, has been engrossed in the depiction of the African culture. He in his books has shown us copiously that Africa is a continent to behold, even before the advent of the white man. Little wonder his books are replete with African ways of life in such a magnitude that the western reader will be taken aback, since Africa was said to have no culture before the advent of the white man. At this juncture, one would like to throw more light on the key words: "Culture" and "Nationalism" so as to point out how it is used in this context under discuss.

According to the **New International Webster Comprehensive Dictionary of the English Language**, the word "culture" is the sum total of the attainments and activities of any specific period, race of people including their implements, hand crafts, agriculture, economics, music, art religious beliefs, traditions, language and story" (311). "Nationalism" according to the same dictionary "is a national custom, trait" etc. (854).

Cultural Nationalism in the Concubine

Helen Chukwuma also sees Amadi's Omakachie "as a village in harmony where stability and peace rest on tradition and custom" (21). According to her also, "as a culturalist, he takes after Achebe though Amadi's village is riverine, showing the same stable self-sustaining culture' (21). Also, according to Eileen Sweeney "Nigerian authors who have chosen traditional settings for their stories seem to have deeper and more positive motives, than that of Yeats' scorn; their intentions to be twofold, first, to re-educate their own people and bring them back to a sense of their own value and dignity. Secondly, to educate the colonizers to rid them of some of their abysmal ignorance to help them to realize that African people did not hear of culture for first time from the Europeans; that their societies were not mindless but frequently have the philosophy of great depth and value and beauty, that they had poetry and above all, they have dignity (166).

In the *Concubine*, we find society inhabited truly by Africans and society was not inhibited by the colonizer and his intrusion into the African cosmos. Here society is replete with African culture, we have the moon light dance, it was said that Wodo Wakiri's knocked knees are best soothed for Oduma, a village dance. The African communalism as experienced in the novel and the abstinence from the European modernism are cases in point. During the rainy season, the harmony enjoyed by mending leaking roofs together is also cases in point. The African marriage system as is practiced in Omokachi village, the middle man phenomenon. The pantheist nature of African society and all what not. The belief in reincarnation, superstition, which are truly African, are here re-emphasized to make for the harmony.

Once in a while we are also told that the harmony is destroyed by the death of Young men who are potential suitors of Ihuoma. Society was not in a turpsy turvy situation as we find in things Fall Apart, just to mention but a few. Conflicts here are between man and the gods who try to show that they are at a higher pedestal.

According to Eustace palmer "the concubine conveys most truthfully the quality of life not just in one particular region, but of most African societies. The activities he describes daily excursions to the farm, setting traps for hunting, singing and dancing in the evening, the effortless musical improvisation, the marriage customs, divinations, and fear of the gods are all integral to numerous African villages (PP 117-118). The *Concubine* is indeed replete with African culture. Here, there is no trace of the white man as you find in books of the colonial period. It truly depicted the African setting as it was in the time of old before the cultural instruction.

Amadi has truly answered the white man for his ignorance in the depiction of the African scene dismally.

Here is an example of such scenes.

Many events called degree of intimacy between the villagers, take the sharing of meat after a general village hunt (5)

Eileen Sweeney argues:

That Amadi has kept his Independence by setting all his novels in the past at a time when the smooth surface of traditional society village life had not been rippled by the wash of any colonial boat carrying the new ideas (113).

Palmer observes that:

The Concubine conveys most truthfully the quality of life not just in one particular region, but to most African societies (119).

According to Chukwuma in *The Concubine* the society is fully life intact and harmonious, the centre held and things did not fall part (13). Further, on the Ekwueme's lust for Ihuoma Chukwuma asserts thus "Ihuoma's rejection humiliated Ekwueme and his frustration at societies norms which subjugated an individual desires was only the remote cause that fortified young Ahuruloe's love 'portion' which drove Ekwueme up a tree, distancing him from mother, father, wife, friends and society in a psychological protest and rejection" (111).

One finds a situation in which Huoma, thought twenty two cannot marry Ekwueme because of societal ethos, norms and values. She has given birth in an earlier marriage. We find out that the African cosmology is fraught with rich norms and values which check the excesses of society. Young men are supposed to marry young women who have not given birth. Ihuoma's rejection leads to Ekwueme Climbing on the three. It was Ihuoma's presence that brought him down and cured him of his delirium.

Cultural Nationalism in the Slave

The slave is replete with African culture as we can find the prominence given to wrestling. We can also see the villagers bemoaning their plight because the strongest wrestler does not come from Aliji that year. We also find that in the Ikwerre cosmology before a girl is given in marriage she will enter the Mgbede where she will be taught about the people's lore as far as marriage is concerned. Here too marriage negotiations are made and the would be husband can also foot part of the bill. The Mgbede is a preparatory ceremony where the girl's body is rubbed with cam wood until her skin shines. The girl in Mgbede is also adorned with gift from neighbours and the Mgbede can stay as much as two or even three years. During this period the girl is not supposed to know any man and any man who constituted nuisance is painted red. At the end of the Mgbede the other family will present the Egbu- Kele masquerade amidst dancing and drinking, and funfair. Society too was pantheist in nature as the people believed in many gods like the Omokachi society in *The Concubine*.

Also, society was agrarians as farming was the order of the day. The white man was not seen- Society was unadulterated, the centre held. Africans marked the beginning year and even the days of the week as well the farming and the wrestling seasons. They know when their crops are ripe for harvest. During the outing ceremony, for the mbgede, four booths were constructed, one for the drummer, another for Bekweri's family a large one for the guest and a fourth whose function was yet unknown. The day before, Bekweri's relations from outside Aliji had arrived. (p 129). Five girls were in attendance; they addressed her hair in the Ojongo style and put on her many coral beads (179). This is the special way Amadi captured the outing ceremony. It is really an epoch making occasion.

Even the king himself, Eze minikwe was in attendance. A cloths home was also erected and covered with costly wrappers "also the celebrant and her troupe resorted for rest in the cloths' house after every dance. The coming out of the Ebukele masquerades was the crescendo and everything went well in this marriage to the utter dismay of Olumati. According to Adiba" many people in Aliji are still not sure you are not a slave of Amadioha. I know you are not but people are stubborn" (184) Wizo finally had Enaa's hand in marriage to the consternation of Olumati. The theme of Antagonism goes through the length and breadth of the novel. Olumati who made all attempts to stay despite his mother's remonstrations goes back to Isiali. The Echela family was therefore in extinction or moribund by the end of the novel.

According to Ebele Eko, *The Slave* is probably the most ideological profound of Amadi's novels, forcing the reader to examine and re-examine many assumptions, to ask fundamental questions and to consider the very important concept at choice within the dynamics of village culture" (132) According to Jasper:

Amadi may not have written his masterpiece but he is undeniably a significant writer who has made invaluable contribution to African literature in theme and vision and especially in the use of suspense and dialogue which are enduring aspects of his aesthetics (48).

Finally, one can say without gainsaying that Amadi has come of age and has truly depicted the African milieu the way it is before the coming of the white man.

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