

Amadi's Man: Savage or Homo Religiosus?

GEORGE NYAMNDI

University of Lausanne, Switzerland

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1. OF RELIGION

Man's soul has governed relations between peoples and powers right from the day the biblical serpent tricked our ancestors out of God's favour. Even in this originating crisis, the prize-money was the human soul, here resolved in terms of belief in God or in his mortal adversary the devil. Everything else thereafter has only been a re-enactment of this first drama

Even civilizations have risen and fallen according to their grip or the loss of it on man, and more especially on that part of man that makes of him a believing animal. The code-name of the theatre for this tussle is religion, understood here in its Hortonian sense of "belief in extra-human personal beings and action in relation to such beings" (Horton 1991: 5), but also in its Marxist acceptance as ideology.

The turmoil presently threatening the Middle East with obliteration, the Iraqi saga, even Turkey's difficulty to book a place in the European Union: all these are modern-day instances of civilizational/economic wars with strong religious undercurrents.

Ludwig Feuerbach, the 19th century German atheistic materialist argues that since religion is to be understood in terms of its psychogenesis from human nature itself, it implies an inverse relationship between the attributes accorded to the deity and those accorded to humans and the finite world: "What humans deny to themselves they attribute to god. Consequently, the more empty life is, the fuller, the more concrete is God. The impoverishing of the real world and the enriching of God is one act" (Morris 1987: 22).

Upon analysis, one discovers this statement to be just a stratagem that equates god with the capitalist man, and in which, as Marx and Engels explain, "religion had the double function of compensating the suffering of the poor with promises of spiritual wealth, while simultaneously legitimating the wealth of the dominant class" (Turner 1978: 80).

Even before Marx and Engels, the fourth century Roman Emperor Constantine had enunciated the philosophy of materialist determinism in religion very boldly in his own day. As Knight and Lomas state,

His vision for the common people was to use them to produce goods and wealth in peacetime and provide soldiery in time of war; their reward for

their sad, ignorant little lives was the promise of their own personal resurrection and a wonderful after life (274).

The desire to impoverish the real world therefore has a concomitant bearing on the African experience, and more especially on the way its religious life was handled by successive European occupants of the continent.

Whereas historical world religions (Islam, Buddhism, Judaism) are treated as conceptual entities by (Western) students of comparative religion, African religions have, up until recent times, been dismembered into headings like mana, taboo, totemism, magic, shamanism, myth, etc., in order to underline their inconsequence or exotic appeal (Morris, 1987). The study of African religions is therefore attended by a strong ideological intention, namely to demonstrate that the continent's belief register is empty at best, filled with gibberish at worst; in any case, that there is vast room in it for Western doctrinal *qua* ideological material.

Amadi provides creative disclaimers to these views by showing the organic link between religious practice and social fulfillment in tribal societies. The Amadian villager does not indulge in hysterical religiosity; nor does he feel the need to seek fulfillment in an artificial belief in a foreign god the way the slaves of the Americas were known to do. Religious worship is an integral part of the Amadian villager's consciousness, just like farming, hunting, festival celebrations, and ritual.

Whereas Marx thought of religion as the first form of alienation, the Amadian villager construes it as a restorative and sustaining force.

Elechi Amadi's early fictions, especially *The Concubine*, *The Slave* and *The Great Ponds*, are structured around a certain number of cultural prescriptions whose purpose is to provide specific insights into the particular universe of each work. Though not completely shut off from the rest of the world either in temporal or in spatial terms, these early fictions are sufficiently introspective to constitute unique aesthetic and dialectical experiences of their own. In such circumstances, the uninitiated reader easily wanders off the path and into jungles of discursive difficulty and interpretative stereotypes.

In order, therefore, to construct a schema of symbolization capable of bringing the fictional intention to light, it becomes necessary to identify and ascertain the constituent importance of each cultural prescription. This paper sets out to do just that; namely to seek out the cultural/religious signposts and pillars that sustain thought and action in the Amadian universe, and through such an effort demonstrate their ideological underpinnings. Our methodology steers clear of Afro/Eurocentrism, and of the corresponding adulation/chastisement polarity. We are not seeking either to hold back the hands of the clock in these days of "intellectual modernization" (Horton 1991: 302). Rather, we hope to do a little to advance understanding of modernity by looking at it from the standpoint of the traditional.

With the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947 and their declassification by the Israeli authorities in October 1991, Christianity has come under closer

exegetic scrutiny. That is how it has been discovered that the religion's locus standi is provided exclusively by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, real or mythical. But the other religions betray far less hermeneutic fragility. According to Knight and Lomas,

There is no sudden influx of information that could fundamentally damage Judaism, Islam, Buddhism or even for that matter the belief systems of the Australian Aborigines or the Amazon Indians, because they are religions that have grown from a deep spiritual understanding evolved slowly out of their own cultures. Even without Gautama, Buddhism lives; without Mohammed, Islam lives; yet without the resurrection of Jesus, Christianity (as it currently stands) is nothing (251).

In 1964 Chinua Achebe, the leading apologist of the African image, stated in a conference on Commonwealth literature at Leeds: "Here then is an adequate revolution for me to espouse – to help my society regain its belief in itself and put away the complexes of the years of denigration and self-denigration" (Innes and Lindfors 1978: 279). The seminal strength of this pronouncement lies in the fact that the passage of time only adds to its potency. Present-day Africa continues to be entangled in a hopeless struggle to ward off the current of denigration and self-denigration dogging its journey forward. The new spirit of liberalism riding on the crest of globalization whisks past the continent as if to celebrate its total insignificance.

As Western economies soar to dizzying heights of performance, and people out there settle into a quiet enjoyment of life's joys, Africa's populations steep ever deeper into disease, hunger and debt. Achebe's 1964 pronouncement thus becomes more prophetic with every passing day.

The artist-as-physician poise that he assumed in 1964 has since transformed into a tradition, making of African literature a curative experience, a therapeutic answer, in creative terms, to the fundamental malaise lodged in the quest for an identity. Each African writer ever since Achebe has come to view himself/herself, either consciously or by association, as a contributor to the healing process.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o for one locates the origin of the malaise in European presence in Africa, which he views in purely disruptive terms. As he says, "Inflated with holy zeal, the missionaries rooted out their proselytes from African societies. Christian bigotry and misguided altruism was here at work, and the destiny of those who dwelt therein was hell" (Innes and Lindfors 1978: 279). The negative impact of the Europe/Africa encounter comes across most trenchantly here in Ngugi's lexical attitude. Zeal, bigotry, and misguided altruism reveal anything but a good intention. These missionaries operated within a logic of substitution at best, of annihilation at worst. In the battle of the gods sparked by them, there was room only for one god, their own, and for the Africans only the spiritual nothingness of hell.

Ngugi's Marxist outlook is common knowledge, and when we turn to Marx we discover that in his thinking, religion was the first form of ideology, which

he linked inseparably to the material conditions of life. The missionary expeditions in Africa were therefore propelled by this Marxist spirit, with its premium on faith at the service of economic wealth; a spirit in which “the dominant class mystify and control the peasants, in feudal society, and the workers in capitalism” (Morris 1987: 44). In *Capital*, Marx wrote:

Even the history of religion is uncritical unless this material base is taken into account. Of course it is much easier, from an analysis of the hazy constructions of religion, to discover their earthly core, than conversely, to deduce from a study of the material conditions at any particular time, the celestial forms that these may assume. But the latter is the only materialistic method, and therefore the only scientific one. The abstract materialism of a natural science that excludes the historical process is defective (Marx 1957: 393).

The study of the material conditions of any given society at any given time in its history is therefore the only empirical method into an understanding of its religious workings. The link between religion and material interest is therefore established, and in turn accounts for the symbiosis in action between church and business in Africa.

The tabula rasa made of African religious practice by the missionaries was legitimated by the preliterate mentality theory propounded by thinkers like Karl Marx and Lévy Bruhl. The latter’s essential premise was that African and European minds were two contrasting ideal types, as their separate typologies made clear. He thus established the following characteristics of European thought:

- that it is naturalistic and tends towards objectivity.
- that it equates science and commonsense experience.
- that since a mystical orientation is lacking, European thought frees man’s natural sensitivity to contradiction and allows him to perceive the world as something separate and distinct – something to be mastered and controlled rather than related to (Morris 1987: 185).

At the same time, Lévy Bruhl construed primitive – that is to say African - thought as essentially mystical, according to which the world was not perceived in a natural sense but was highly coloured by and invested with emotion and with notions about supernatural entities; whence the feeling of unity with plants and animals. In other words, preliterate people communed with the natural world rather than perceive it. In a sense, preliterate thought was essentially mystical, whereas western thought was more positivistic.

Religious integrity in Amadi’s fictional milieu rests on a blend of Levy Bruhl’s pre-literate mentality and Evans Pritchard’s logicity. While according a dominant place in his belief charter to mystical and fetishistic determinism, the Amadian man also incorporates into his existential strategies, elements of the

logical, the rational, so that a thief does not blame his act on witchcraft but rather on his own compartmental deficiency.

2. THE AMADIAN DEITY

The supernatural plays a dominant role in Amadi's early fiction. As we have stated earlier, this role is not only artistic or social; it is above all dialectical. The author therefore handles this aspect of his creativity with attention to verisimilitude in the characters and situations as a sure means of obtaining the suspension of the reader's disbelief. In other words, he makes the supernatural function in such a way as to enlist full belief in its plausibility and in so doing strengthen the underlying dialectical intention. As Palmer underlines, the use of supernatural agents in a novel always presents grave difficulties; such as the problem of rendering them credible and realistic (1972: 56). Credibility and realism, then, are necessary sustaining criteria for the reader's response to all non-empirical features in any given work. In *The Concubine* "these two preoccupations are ordered in a means-and-end sequence, credibility being borne by realism of analysis and exposition" (Nyamndi 1982: 190).

In *The Concubine* Amadi wins our sympathy through the use of structuring as a dialectical device. The first half of the book pays particular attention to the religious institutions of Omokachi village and demonstrates by aid of apposite narrative incidents the central place these institutions occupy in the daily life of the Omokachi villager.

The opening action focuses on the fight between Emenike and Madume over a piece of land. This conflict sets the realistic tone, and maintains it over the new elements that result from and amplify the dispute. Having defined a realistic frame of reference at the social level, Amadi then injects the religious element into it: "Madume was relieved when he heard that Emenike was back home. It was true he was in very bad shape himself, but the possibility of killing a man filled him with fear. The cost of the rites of purification was prohibitive and even after that he would still be a branded man" (3). Here is revealed in a nutshell the religious basis of Omokachi's social organization: it is not the possibility of a court trial that fills Madume with fear but the looming threat of divine chastisement. A man who kills his kinsman has wronged the gods primarily and must seek absolution in purification sacrifices commensurate with his crime.

Emenike's illness after the fight with Madume provides the occasion for ritual intervention, in the course of which the religious fabric is given sharper scrutiny and exposition. Anyika, the central religious personage comes into view, and so too do the attributes of his office: "Anyika the medicine man was sent for... To the villagers he was just a medicine man and a mediator between them and the spirit world" (5-6). This presentation is then substantiated by the practical exercise of his office, in which he is seen pouring libation and hanging

amulets on doors to keep away evil spirits. The exposition is progressive and judicious. The reader is being introduced to the main corners of the stage, and concurrently to the principal actors. Anyika's libation shows man, the gods and the ancestors communing in a spirit of sacred and secular harmony. The gods are not far; they are near. Invisible physically, they fill man and object with their spiritual presence, and partake of human action in ways that are essentially concrete. The epithets attributed to them underline the villagers' ethical insight and cosmic pragmatism. Amadioha is king of the skies; Ojukwu is the fair, and the other gods have dominion over the Night, the Earth, and the Rivers, elements through which man comes into permanent experience of the divine presence and influence.

The ritual act performed by Anyika is part of a complex structure of religious observation defined by rules and ordinances. When Ihuoma proposes a sacrifice to Amadioha on her sick husband's behalf, the god's priest Nwokekoro answers: "My daughter, that will be on Eke, the usual day for sacrifices" (9). Details of this kind demonstrate a religious order with a solid internal logic and organization. The priests too are men chosen for their integrity: "Certain standards of social, moral and ethical behaviour are expected of priests... they are men and women of respectable character: trustworthy, devout, obedient to the traditions of their office and to God or the divinities that they serve, friendly, kind, 'educated' in matters of their profession, and religious" (Mbiti 1969: 189). This portraiture by one of Africa's leading scholars of African religions finds sublime echo in Nwokekoro:

The next caller was Nwokekoro, the priest of Amadioha the god of thunder and of the skies. He was a short fat man, old but well preserved and had an easy-going disposition. He never seemed to be bothered about anything. He had no wife and no compound of his own. His small house was in his junior brother's compound. He was getting too old for active farming, so his yams were few and he owned very little property. He was friendly with everyone and was highly respected. His office as high priest of the most powerful god lent him great dignity (8).

The priests of the Roman Catholic Church take the triple vow of chastity, poverty, and obedience. Nwokekoro, without being a product of that denomination, nevertheless upholds its tenets in ways that can only underline the basic similarity of all religions. As Horton states, "The besetting sin of many writers on African thought-systems has been to treat as unique, many features which in fact are much more widely shared or even universal" (1991: 2). The requirements of African priesthood tie very closely here as we can see, with those of its Western equivalent; but unless the investigating scholar frees his mind of the limitations of cultural prejudices, he will see as exotic, even peculiar, what is in fact only a given response to a universal function.

Social realism of the kind imparted to Nwokekoro, causes the reader to develop a vicarious respect for, even if not belief in, the god that he serves. Amadi does not depend for dialectical effect on abstract or dogmatic statements,

but on realistic strokes of the kind that bring characters like Nwokekoro so convincingly alive. The gods, too, are brought down from their remove and presented at work among the villagers. Mini Wekwu, for instance, curbs evil both within and between the adjoining villages, thereby promoting good neighbourliness. The peaceful coexistence between Omokachi and Chiolu contrasts boldly with the deadly enmity between Chiolu and Aliakoro in *The Great Ponds*. In the latter work, the Pond of Wagaba also serves as a boundary between the villages of Chiolu and Aliakoro, but it is not home to any god and so lacks the sacred power of Mini Wekwu stream in *The Concubine*. In fact in *The Great Ponds*, the Pond of Wagaba is plundered and defiled at leisure, and is also the theatre of much bloodshed.

Ojukwu, for his part, has a more immediate role with regard to diseases and epidemics, especially smallpox.

Next in rank to Amadioha was Ojukwu, who was said to control smallpox. This disease was so dreaded that villagers dared not call it by name. They called it "the good thing" A patient was normally isolated and when he died (at times of starvation) no one dared weep... Worship of the god was most intense at the height of an epidemic and several rules were rigidly adhered to.

In a rare moment of direct authorial intervention, but one that reflects Amadi's concern with fictional realism, he interjects a parenthetical statement to emphasize the cruelty in abandoning smallpox victims to starve to death. His fictional universe thus gains in strength of conviction for being exposed in all its ugliness. The author does not gloss over details, no matter how unpleasant. He is not appealing to any specific emotion but to all the emotions.

But Ojukwu is not only Nemesis. He incarnates ethical values and assumes corporeality to supervise and sustain their implementation:

It was not uncommon for the god to visit villagers at such times. He normally appeared in the form of a familiar neighbour or a child to ask for one trifle or the other. He would for instance appear in the form of a woman and ask a neighbour for vegetables to make her soup. Refusal might mean catching the disease. So during epidemics people were kinder and quarrelling women observed a compulsory truce (15).

The communistic ethos of this religious practice reveals its social, man-centred outlook and by this same token places it in sharp contrast with the Christian practice which, as an economic organization, was used for domination and exploitation. Even as the villagers in *The Concubine* are enjoying this religious felicity, their counterparts in *Things Fall Apart* are already experiencing the pangs of economic and religious oppression unleashed on them by European missionaries and administrators *cum* businessmen.

Ojukwu's immanence raises to a sacred act of communion with the gods, the secular gesture of sharing vegetables with a neighbour or of listening to a child's little desires. Fellow-feeling thus becomes the highest tribute that man can pay

to the gods; fellow-feeling of the kind extolled by the Catholic faith in Mathew 25: 37–40:

Then the upright will ask him: “Lord, when did we see you hungry and give you food; thirsty and give you drink, or a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to see you? The King will answer, “Truly, I say to you: whenever you did this to one of the least, of these my brothers, you did it to me.

The confluence of traditional African religious practice and Judeo-Christian teaching of the kind witnessed here certainly holds more than just a comparative interest: it is a dialectical vindication of a specific worldview, here the African, and of its right to rehabilitation.

The gods of Omokachi are deployed in a hierarchic order that points ultimately to the monotheistic superstructure of Omokachi’s religious belief, culminating as it does in Chineke, “the creator of spirits and men” (59). This ordering places the religious philosophy of Omokachi within the ontological register of Engels, according to whom:

Religion is the fantastic reflection in men’s minds of those external forces which control their daily life... In the beginning of history it was the forces of nature which were first so reflected and which in the course of further evolution underwent the most manifold and varied personification among the various peoples... At a still further stage of evolution, all natural and social attributes of the numerous gods are transferred to one almighty god, who is but a reflection of the abstract man. Such was the origin of monotheism (Marx 1957: 131).

Within a purely African philosophical context, Mbiti states that divinities “are on the whole thought to have been created by God, in the ontological category of spirits. They are associated with Him, and often stand for His activities or manifestations either as personifications or as the spiritual beings in charge of these major objects or phenomena of nature” (75–76).

Apprehended in anthropomorphic terms, the gods attest to the villagers’ resolve to give concreteness to their relationship with their Creator, Chineke. In this regard, Horton notes:

If we assume that the gods of any population have become co-ordinated to individuals and the various levels of grouping that include them as a result of a process of selection based on perceived relevance to particular goals at particular levels of structural reference, we can expect to find ‘written in’ to the character of any god some implication of relevance in the particular social context where it has become fixed (30).

The different gods referred to above are exemplary embodiments of this sacred and secular duality which underlines, conditions and shapes human life in Amadi’s traditional universe. His detailed perception, within a fictional context,

of these realistic religious arguments only heightens our disposition to accept his own realist intentions.

The review of the village pantheon ends with Amadioha, Omokachi's principal deity, first among "God's associates" (*The Concubine*, 75). Ruler over the skies and purveyor of rain and sunshine, Amadioha is the most feared and the most venerated of all the gods, a deity whose name no man can invoke when guilty. He holds his worshippers in chaste fear through which they acknowledge the god's supreme authority and their own inferior humanity. But the villagers' relationship with Amadioha, as indeed with all the other deities of the local pantheon, is one of concrete communion. Worship at his shrine therefore takes on the nature of a close personal dialogue between god and man, through which complaints are resolved, wishes met, and during which the god reveals himself to men so that they can better testify to his existence:

After the main rites Nwokekoro built a fire from a glowing orepe brand which one old man had brought along. The cocks were killed according to ancient rites and boiled with the yams. Before any part of the meal was touched, the priest cut off one wing of the chicken and threw it casually to the right side of the temple. The old men were evidently used to this and did not watch his movement... in a matter of seconds a huge grey serpent crawled out from behind the shrine and began to swallow its share of the feast. It showed no fear and the old men bowed their heads in reverence. The god having been fed, the men fell on the remains of the feast (17-18).

This worship scene closes the first half of the novel's action, but no mention has as yet been made of the sea-king, the principal actor in the collective drama of the village. The reader has been made familiar with the sea-king's other divine peers, their powers, and method of retribution: perjury exposes its perpetrator to Amadioha's thunderbolt; anti-social behaviour to Ojukwu's smallpox; and witchcraft to extermination by Mini Wekwu. The division of functions among the deities observed here is reminiscent of the territorial control exercised by the Egyptian and Babylonian gods in the centuries prior to Christianity.

This religious activity comes against the background of Emenike's illness, and more especially against that of his marriage with Ihuoma. Emenike dies unexpectedly shortly hereafter, and veers the dialectical significance of structuring unto its main course. A solid religious foundation has already been laid, so that when the sea-king finally appears, he is accepted for the same reasons that the other deities were accepted; that is to say as a living force within the specific socio-religious context of Omokachi.

3. DEITIES AMONG MEN

In their 1996 bestselling work *The Hiram Key*, Christopher Knight and Robert Lomas ask the rhetorical question: Jesus: Man, God, Myth or Freemason?, then proceed to establish grounds for considering him as all of these. In fact he is called Yehoshua ben Joseph, meaning ‘saviour the son of Joseph’ (291). This question tends to argue that there was a time not very far back in human history when gods were known to commune with mortals in very direct ways. Depending on the cultural context one is looking at, divine immanence can be observed – even believed in – much closer to our day.

The novels under study do not have any precise dating, but it can reasonably be stated that they relate happenings somewhere in a past when gods and men mingled on a daily basis.

It is actually in Ihuoma that the anthropomorphic attributes of the deities in Omokachi are most boldly etched. Although she grows up in the village and even marries there, she is portrayed in a way that leaves little doubt as to her divine origins:

That she was beautiful she had no doubt, but that did not make her arrogant. She was sympathetic, gentle, and reserved. It was her husband’s boast that in their six years of marriage she had never had any serious quarrel with another woman. She was not good at invectives and other women talked much faster than she did. The fact that she would be outdone in a verbal exchange perhaps partly restrained her from coming into open verbal conflict with her neighbours. Gradually she acquired the capacity to bear a neighbour’s stinging remarks without a repartee. In this way her prestige among the womenfolk grew until even the most garrulous among them was reluctant to be unpleasant to her. She found herself settling quarrels and offering advice to elder women (*The Concubine*: 11–12).

Interestingly enough, at least one Western critic has seen in this picture only the evidence of insipidity. Nesbitt says: “We can reasonably draw the conclusion that Ihuoma was not particularly bright intellectually, but that she was able to make a virtue out of this potential weakness” (1974: 33). On the other hand, Obiechina, himself a Nigerian critic and therefore closer to the religious reality informing Amadi’s fiction, says “She is a solid block of perfection, almost cold and inhuman in her perfection” (1975: 97). This perfection is verified in everything she does, whether it be caring for her children: “Her children were neat and well fed” (*The Concubine*: 36), or tending her farm: “her farm was so thoroughly weeded that, as Nnenda remarked, one could feed off the ground” (36). Her unusual integrity is acknowledged by just about everyone in the village: “She is easily the best woman in the village” (92); “She is about the best woman in the village” (54); “She is a well-behaved young woman” (85).

The villagers marvel at this nature which is so unlike theirs, and Wolu articulates this admiration well:

She had a secret liking for Ihuoma. Apart from her obvious beauty, her open, frank and gentle nature appealed to her. Why, even after Emenike's fight with her husband, Ihuoma had greeted her each time they met on the way – a thing most women would not do. It was more usual under such conditions for women to sneer at their opposite number and show every indication of dislike (19–20).

Her own visit to Ihuoma after Emenike's death illustrates this strangeness. When she arrives, Ihuoma's first impulse is to tell her to her face that she is shedding the tears of the wicked, but her gentle nature prevails and she stares at Wolu steadily. Ihuoma's mother Okachi's arrival touches the situation with a more natural response. Like her daughter she is outraged by the role (supposedly) played by Wolu's husband in Emenike's death, but unlike her daughter she gives free play to her outrage:

“What does that witch want?” she asked.

“She came to sympathize with me.”

“To mock you, you mean.”

“I do not know.”

“They have killed your husband and now they want to laugh at you.

Amadioha will kill them one by one” (20).

Okachi's harsh outburst is a fitting measure of her outrage, in which she comes across more convincingly, more human, than her daughter whose composure under the circumstances borders on the marvelous.

Emenike's death marks the turning point in Ihuoma's ambiguous membership in Omokachi. Fear and anguish during his illness, and now sorrow and loneliness at his death, have shocked her into a brutal awareness of the bitter facets of life, and caused her divine countenance to yield to more human responses to events. Her initial impulse to express anger at Wolu's visit constitutes the first stirrings of the human side of her nature. The divine element in her has lasted its course and as adversities accumulate she also becomes more recognizably human. She is no longer an observer but a participant in life, sharing intensely in its joys and woes. The change in her nature is noticeable when she visits her mother in Omigwe after Emenike's death. When Okachi recommends Ekwueme to her as a possible husband, she reacts with great heat: “Now Ihuoma did a rare thing with her mother – she lost her temper” (41). This statement shifts emphasis from the marble goddess to a living being whose dormant emotions have sprung to life: “Greet Nkechi and the new baby when you get back,” Ihuoma said a little nervously (46); “Nwonna, go and warm the soup in the kitchen,” Ihuoma ordered (46); “You are digging up my floor,” Ihuoma protested (47). The initiation into human life seems complete. Ihuoma can now feel and express emotions like any ordinary human being. Thus when

Wigwe introduces himself into her house late in the night and imperiously orders her to marry his son Ekwueme, a sense of affront overwhelms her.

As Ihuoma's humanization advances, the spiritual side of her also recedes in equal measure. The villagers continue to admire her, in other words to sustain her spiritual essence, but she feels herself too human now to continue to bear the weight of divine perfection:

As her prestige mounted its maintenance became more trying. She became more sensitive to criticism and would go to any lengths to avoid it. The women adored her. Men were awestruck before her. She was becoming something of a phenomenon. But she alone knew her internal struggle. She knew she was not better than anyone else. She thought her virtues were the product of chance. As the days went by she began to loathe her so-called good manners. She became less delighted when people praised her. It was as if they were confining her to an ever-narrowing prison (153).

In spite of Ihuoma's feeling of equality with the other villagers, they continue to look up to her as an example, as something of a phenomenon. This perhaps is the firmest proof if not of her divine origins at least of her divine nature. She is really not too far from the Mary-figure in Christian religion, and on this score one can argue a place for her among the divinities that walk the earth.

4. CONCLUSION

We said in our preliminary remarks that the fate of cultures depended on their capacity for religious survival and ascendancy. In reviewing life in the Amadian village from the standpoint of its religious solidity and relevance, we have striven to present Amadi's worldview as non-confrontational, holistic and overly religious. By placing his prototype villager beyond the corrupting influence of Western religions, and showing him as he rises to challenges and avails himself of the other joys of existence, Amadi has been able to posit the view that human dignity is not necessarily tied to industrialism and/or dogged materialism, but is to be found in its purest form among peoples who still claim close ties with nature. Written into the texture of this argument is the transcendental moral statement that urges respect for people's ways and views, a statement that certainly stands the hegemonistic cultures of this nascent third millennium in good stead. In the final analysis, religion is man's weapon against enmity, not a bait for calamities.

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About the author: George Nyamndi holds a Ph.D. in Literature from the University of Lausanne, Switzerland. He has published extensively on African literature. He is the author of the landmark critical work: *The West African Village Novel, with particular Reference to Elechi Amadi's The Concubine*, of two successful plays, *The Bite* and *The Will*, and of a forthcoming novel, *Babi Yar*. He is currently Senior Lecturer in African Literature and Head of the Department of English at the University of Buea.