

Review

The force of charms in Elechi Amadi's “ *The concubine*” and “ *The great ponds*”

Labo Bouche Abdou

English Department, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, P. O. Box: 418, University Abdou Moumouni of Niamey, Niamey, Niger. E-mail: labo57ma@yahoo.fr. Tel: (227)96-97-07-50.

Accepted 12 December, 2017

Most often when people speak of fetish, enchantment or spell in traditional African societies, they refer to the inexplicable side of religious beliefs inherited from forebears. There are two kinds of fetishes: negative and positive. The first is a preparation destined to harm the enemy, while the second is concocted in order to heighten the merit of someone or his destiny. The preoccupation of Elechi Amadi while treating the theme of fetishes in *The Concubine* (1966) and *The Great Ponds* (1982) was, clearly bound to the geographical environment in which the author grew up, his cultural environment and the political events of the time, in this part of Africa. Throughout these two novels, Elechi Amadi insisted on the use, the role and the importance of fetishes in the African societies of the time. It was one of the proofs that denied the false prejudice of *tabula rasa*¹. The Novelist demonstrated that before the arrival of the White, Africa was organized, contrary to the colonizer's appreciation. Africans enjoyed a culture, a tradition and a civilization. The use of fetishes by Amadi was a form of expression of these traditional religious beliefs, in order to fight against the colonial prejudice stipulating that Africa was a dark continent, obscure and ignorant in all senses, in all domains and on all plans.

Key words: Fetishes, *Dibia* (seer), African.

INTRODUCTION

The use of charms in Amadi's novels reinforces the idea that African communities were not mindless before the coming of the white man. They were well organized and their culture among the best. Since the African writers are fighting against colonial prejudice of *tabula rasa*- Africa is a dark continent and Africans are ignorant- they have to show how their traditions are manifested. That is also one of the reasons which lead Amadi to portray African traditional religion positively in his writings. The aim of this paper is to assess the importance of *Dibias*, fetishes and charms in the ancestral Africa and their impact on African societies.

Influence of *Dibia*, priest and their charms or talisman on the Ikwerre² community

The Concubine opens with a fight between two villagers, Madume and Emenike, over a piece of land. This struggle is the starting point of the novel. An important character, Anyika, is introduced. As a famous *Dibia*, nobody knows his village. Amadi presents him as a strange person since "no one quite knew where Anyika had come from"(5). This *Dibia* is invited to see if nothing is behind the sickness of Emenike, the husband of Ihuoma who is the heroine of the novel. Before the divination, there is a hint that Emenike's illness has another source. It is said Ihuoma's husband on earth "wanted to explain that his illness was not necessarily a result of the fight, since in any case he threw Madume twice and gave him a worse beating"(8). The memorable thing is the way Anyika performs the charm. Before hanging "an amulet over the doorway to bar the way for evil spirit" (6), the *Dibia* recites in a poetic form, the

¹The false prejudice of *tabula rasa* was that before colonization Africa was a dark continent.

²Ekwerre is Elechi Amadi's ethnical group. The orthography can be Ekwere or Erekwí.

following incantations:

“Gods of the night, take this;
 Gods of the Earth, take this;
 Ojukwu the fair, take this;
 This is yours;
 And you ancestors, small and great, guardians of
 this compound, take this” (8).

The verse has rhythmical effect: “take this” comes at the end of each verse. The use of the punctuations is made exactly in the same way as the gods are implored; and finally most of the gods and the ancestors are cited according to their role and rank in the Ikwerre cosmology. In the earliest days of the Nigerian Independence, when the characters are acting in *The Concubine*, the Africans were deep-rooted in the occult forces; that explains the use of varied divinities by Amadi (1967). In 1966 when the book was published, the author used his narrative to make Africans recognize their threatened ancestral religion. His goals are not merely historical, but part of the agenda of making traditional material relevant to the modernization effort.

To prove the place reserved to charms in the Ikwerre's traditions, the novelist introduces us to another seer, Nwokekoro, the priest of Amadioha the god of thunder and skies. Priests themselves are extremely dangerous in the minds of inhabitants and thus deserve a consideration. The insistence of the author on the fact that Nwokekoro has not a wife and a compound of his own proves that intermediaries are mysterious. A mature, healthy and wealthy man cannot stay wifeless and homeless, unless he is in connection with supernatural forces. One more thing unusual is the way Nwokekoro makes rains, regulates or stops it. Elechi Amadi evokes this mystery not really because he is astonished or unfamiliar with it: he simply wants to prove to Europeans that:

“Like every powerful weapon, religion can and has been used for good and ill...religion has played a particular important role in ethical philosophy all down the ages because it has been a useful instrument for enforcing moral codes...”(1982: 3- 4).

By narrating the history of the African culture through fiction, Amadi invites westerners too to stop telling unknown things about a continent which is strange to them, or which they know only superficially. A European will hardly understand Africans and their culture especially their ancestral religion. For the Ikwerre, for example, “the vulture was the sacred bird of Ojukwu and if one settled on a man's roof, he ran immediately to a medicine man to divine the message from the god”(15) but how can a Whiteman understand that the vulture is the sacred bird of Ojukwu? How will he know that he has to run straight to a medicine man if a vulture settles on his roof? Can he imagine that the landing of a bird of prey

on one's roof is harmful? Taiwo (1967) asserted that:

“Religion in African society places great emphasis on supernatural agencies. The African himself is superstitious and believes very strongly in mystic rites. He reconciles himself to these forces and treats them with reverence and dignity. He believes that his every action is guided and directed by spirits”(1967: 127).

In the old days as Taiwo stated, mystical forces conditioned African religious beliefs. Nothing was done without consulting the oracles, the gods or their deities or at list the *Dibias*. Nwokekoro's statement, “...it was a fact that if Amadioha has insisted on taking a man's life, no medicine man could do anything about it...” (9), foreshadows Emenike's death. No matter how numerous, costly and effective charms are, if the gods have decided, the person will die. That was Emenike's case. His brother Nnadi and his wife Ihuoma have tried everything in vain. It has already been observed that Amadi explores charms and their influence on the Ikwerre community in order to show to the world, that before the white domination, traditional West Africa was full of mysteries which could be usefully employed in the social, political and economic development of contemporary society. When, for example, European doctors spend one to two months before healing a broken leg, traditional healers will take one to two weeks in mending the same fractured leg. As far as sicknesses such as jaundice and asthma are concerned, they are more easily cured by traditional doctors than by modern doctors. The author develops this theme during Madume's visit to Ihuoma's house where he gets hurt. When he consults Anyika the Dibia, Emenike's opponent learns that it is not an ordinary injury. The gods are behind it- several sacrifices will have to be made to appease Emenike's father and his train. The *Dibia* affirms that spirits have been on the look out for Madume, “...so far they have been unable to enter his compound because of the talisman he buried at the entrance” (58). Anyika confirms that Madume hurt himself because he has thought of marrying Ihuoma.

The kind of talisman, which is buried at households' entrances, is necessary. If it is really effective, one can use it, instead of hiring *Niger guards*, a *kori buzu*¹ or watchmen, so that no suspect man will enter one's compound. Now, things start to be clear after Anyika's divination. He tells Madume that “unknown spirits, some of them from the sea, teamed up to destroy [him]. They don't want [him] to have anything to do with Ihuoma”(58). As is exposed by Amadi himself, the talisman is not a miracle. It is a divine practice consisting of imploring and begging the gods for pardon through ritual incantations and varied sacrifices. The talisman itself is represented

¹ A *kori buzu* is a Hausa term meaning a watchman.

by a *gris-gris* or *jagbo* given to its solicitors by the seer.

The incantation, generally a monologue, which the diviner says alone, in front of the shrine, allows the acceptance, by the gods, of sacrifices in order to satisfy believers' request. Such psalms, presented in a poetical form, point out the gods' supremacy over human beings. This supremacy is emphasized by the two verses "no one digs up immature yams", meaning that nobody can equal the gods; and "my hair is not grey, my work undone" expressing the inferiority and the dependence of man in front of the gods. When confronted to the gods, man is helpless. Madume for instance gets into trouble because he refuses to follow the seer's advice of leaving Ihuoma alone. A cobra spits into his eyes; he becomes blind and finally commits the most abominable sin in the traditional religion- he hangs himself. That is why Bernice Idigbe (1985) said:

"The gods in Amadi's *The Concubine* are neither good nor bad; they are only powerful. They use their power to manipulate man, and man's proud attempt to counteract their influence is mere folly and the effort made will inevitably lead to ruin" (2-3).

In opposition to the information which we are given in Achebe's (1956) *Things Fall Apart*, in *The Concubine*, Amadi shows that a *Dibia* cannot touch a dead clansman who hanged himself, unless if he arms himself with amulets and powerful charms before cutting down the body of the man who committed suicide. In both *The Concubine* and *Things Fall Apart*, strangers are invited to bear the corpse to the evil Forest, where it is thrown out. In his philosophical novel *The Ambiguous Adventure*, Kane (1963) employs the character of *La Grande Royale*, during a family meeting on Samba Diallo's destiny, to voice cultural synthesis as the best option open to Africans in their quest to negotiate their bearing in a modern context:

"...We must go to learn from [the Whiteman] the art of conquering without being in the right... If there is a risk, [our elite] are the best prepared to cope successfully with it... If there is good to be drawn from it, they should also be the first to acquire that" (37).

Amadi too, urges Africans to select the best of the European culture and all what is good in their traditional culture, to make a meaningful way of life. He balances a fair dose of the European rational and economic civilisation on one hand, and the mystical economic civilisation of the traditional black West Africa. Madume's death shows that sometimes charms are fallible. The gods are more powerful than the talisman. Niyi Osundare (1980) recognizes this point, when he observes that:

"In no other Nigerian novels have the gods been more dominant than in those of Amadi. Here the

gods, uncanny, implacable and ubiquitous, are not only an essence but a presence, woven as it were into every aspect of human relationship. In *The Concubine*, the sea-king intervenes even before the beginning of the story, and throughout remains the paramount but unseen Force manipulating human life and orchestrating the painful course of men's tragic drama..." (1980: 97).

Despite the numerous charms performed in his favour, Madume dies because the anger of the seaking cannot be atoned. However, his spirit continues to roam the land, hence Wolu's husband loses his life in an undignified way, supporting the fact that the consequences go beyond. As mentioned by the author, "what hurts one man may benefit another" and "a diseased village is a good village to a medicine man" (83-84).

Adaku is convinced that marrying Ihuoma is an awful mistake, because she has got the motherly intuition that Ihuoma is not a common wife. She (Adaku) gets the sensation that any man who will dare to marry Ihuoma will share the same fate reserved to Emenike and Madume by the spirits of the sea. Idigbe (1985) concludes that "Ihuoma is the sea-king's main interest and her male admirers are victims of circumstance and of their own misdeeds" (29).

The love potion

Through Wigwe's wife, Adaku, Amadi introduces another type of charm, the love potion. It is a talisman used mostly by women to catch their husband's love. This kind of charm is well-known among the world of African housewives:

"Usually there are two sides to it. The first is purely an invocation. The soul of the man concerned is invoked and commanded to love or be destroyed. The second is love potion- a simple preparation which is added to the soup"(158).

Once a husband has taken a love potion, he cannot raise the smallest finger in front of his wife. All what he will be eager to do, is to follow her deeds. Anyika explains the effect of love potion to Ahurole, Ekweme's wife, in these terms:

"I am sure you have seen active and intelligent man at Chioulu to perform the love potion for her. Amadi describes Ekwueme under the love potion through Adaku's remarks. She confirms that 'Ekwueme was putting on weight but he was growing duller'. His steps were less springy. He could not wake up at the second cock-crow to make for his traps. He stared at people vacantly and talked less" (163).

The author's description of Ekwueme under the influence

of the negative charm is done gradually. First he finds it difficult to bend over his traps; second he cannot get up early in the morning to make for his traps; third he has not inspected his traps; finally his health is getting worse, up to the point where he loses his senses and goes mad. Fortunately, there is an antidote which can match the love potion. It is a charm which is given to the patient in order to interfere with the love potion.

To sum up this sub-part, I can affirm that love potion is among the remaining mystical aspects of the African traditions. Up to now, in some parts of Africa, love potion is used and still has its effect on people especially among certain Fulani groups such as *Bororo* and *Fudabe*. Housewives constitute the majority of women who use it with the help of *marabouts* and diviners.

Diviners and the invisible world

Ihuoma's lovers ignore the fact that she belongs to the world of spirits. They do not know or refuse to understand that she is married to an invisible man, the sea-king. Perhaps if they had known, they would have found a charm which could neutralize him. Emenike is Ihuoma's husband on Earth. His death passes unnoticed. But the way her second and third lovers (Madume and Ekwueme) died, makes the villagers think. They found out- thanks to the *Dibia*- that a supernatural force, the sea-king is behind their death.

Even the diviners recognize that it is not easy to deal with the cosmic world, the supernatural forces in particular. The healer must be highly trained to overcome a bad spirit or a bad charm. That is why Anyika tells Wigwe that the marriage between Ekwueme and Ihuoma is hardly possible. Strong spirits are against it and nothing can be done to deflect their wrath. Even Madume before his death was warned by the *Dibia* that the water spirits will destroy him if he insists on waiting to marry Ihuoma. She can only be a concubine. The following quotation indicates that the sea-king is also a hidden main character, who is acting in the shade, from the beginning to the end of the novel:

“There are few women like [Ihuoma] 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. With some spirits marriage is possible if an expert on sorcery is consulted. With the sea-king it is impossible. He 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” (196).

Anyika has no fear to tell Ekwueme's father that no *gris-gris* can work out the anger of the seaking, in opposition

to Agwoturumbe, the seer who promise to Wigwe and Adaku that he can bind the sea-king and prevent him from doing any harm to their son.

The description of Agwoturumbe confirms Amadi's ability to portray his characters. It shows also that the sorcerer possesses immense powers. Agwoturumbe “carried no knife or other weapons but everyone knew he was adequately protected” (206). This portrait gives the reader the hint that the *Dibia* is powerful. And by the first sight, customers have the impression that his charms are unailing and sure.

The way people rushed into Wigwe's compound with the coming of Agwoturumbe, proves that the Ikwerre are interested in the talisman: “By evening, clients were pouring into Wigwe's compound for divination” (207).

Does Amadi recommend collaboration in modern Africa between healers, herbalists, seers, *Dibias* and western trained doctors? Perhaps Africans too would borrow a leaf from the Chinese, the Koreans, Indians, and Indonesians who are already making moves in that direction. The positive light in which Amadi portrays charms and *Dibias* in *The Concubine* shows that he believed in their potential usefulness to modern society. The author's use of the present participle “pouring” indicates on one hand the interest that people have on sorcery and on the other hand, it strengthens Amadi's idea of combining traditional and modern sciences to profit from that combination.

The intriguing plot

Amadi's depiction of a peaceful village life dominated by rites and sacrifices is disturbed by an unseen water - spirit. This spirit eliminates whoever among the villagers dares to marry Ihuoma. This extraordinary village woman herself will be detected later by *Dibias*, as belonging to the spiritual world especially the sea-spirits. Indeed, the author's depiction works very well, partly because of the character of Ekwueme whose wild ambition to marry Ihuoma plays her into the hands of the gods. The novelist discusses the force of charms through seven main characters acting one after the other. They can be divided into three groups. The pretenders: the sea-king, Emenike, Madume and Ekwueme; the *Dibias*- Anyika, Nwokekoro and Agwoturumbe; and the third group is represented, by one single person, Ihuoma; she is a victim of her extraordinary beauty and kindness. The whole plot of the novel revolves around her from the beginning to the end of the book. The pretenders do not know that she is not a human being though she insists on becoming so. Ihuoma herself is unaware of her membership of the spiritual world. That is why any expression of love and sympathy shown by the main character for her pretenders is seen as a declaration of war by the sea-king, who will not hesitate to fight them mercilessly and without any delay. The *Dibias* can help

Ihuoma's lovers to know the whole truth about her and the sea-king. But man's boasting pushes them to try to counteract the sea-god's power with charms. "The mystery and ubiquity of the gods, their transmutation into time and space make their very nature incomprehensible to the people" (Idigbe, 1985: 26). The charms have their limitations of effectiveness once confronted to the invisible forces.

The force of charms on traditional communities

In *The Great Ponds*, Amadi continues with the same setting as in his first novel: the Ekwerre and the Igbo area in Eastern Nigeria. The precise setting in the second book is the pond of Wagaba- a pond full of fish, over which two villages- Chiolu and Aliakoro- are laying opposing claims of ownership. That is the beginning of an apparently endless war between the two groups. The battle used more charms, on both sides, than warriors.

In the middle of the book and towards its end, the main plot centres around Olumba, the chief warrior from Chiolu, who is chosen to swear an oath in the name of his village, if the pond belongs to them. The oath is taken in front of all the Ezes of the Ereki clan who want to settle the matter once and for all, since the fight between Chiolu and Aliakoro turns into a dreadful one, and begins to affect the other villages of the clan. At the end of the book the great Influenza of 1918 makes the whole clan suffer so much and loses hope. Nevertheless, the two belligerents, Aliakoro and Chiolu's people still continue to contest the pond of Wagaba with the last energy.

In *The Great Ponds*, Amadi continues to show the powerfulness of charms, an assignment begun in *The Concubine*. The countryside is the same. Nigerian traditional society is painted before external influences changed it. The writer has made a considerable effort to improve his style. *The Great Ponds* opens with Olumba. He is described by Elechi Amadi as the foremost exponent in the use of charms in Chiolu: "After the meal Olumbu removed a small amulet from his neck and substituted a bigger one. The former was for general protection at home, the latter for protection and luck while travelling..." (8). This brief description is, followed by the origin of the struggle, narrated by Eze Diali the chief of Chiolu in these words:

"People of Chiolu...I have learnt that poachers from Aliakoro will be at the great ponds tonight. There is no doubt that they will try to steal from the pond of Wagaba which as you know is to bring one or more of these thieves home alive and ask for heavy ransoms...[that] will be a deterrent..." (8).

Eze Diali's speech is the starting point of all the fights which will occur between Aliokora and Chiolu. Such conflict reminds the conflicts between Nigeria and

Cameroon over the Bakassi isle and between Niger Republic and Benin over the Lete- Gungun isle. This island, like the pond of Wagaba, contains respectively petroleum and gold. On looking at Olumba and his soldiers in Amadi's novel, the villagers recognize that there is trouble:

"When Olumba wore that amulet round his upper arm, things are going to happen. "Looks as if vultures will visit the scene of our fight tonight", Eziho said smiling at Olumba. "Not necessarily", the leader replied. "But I see signs". "Oh, this", Olumba said glancing at the amulet on his arm. "Well I just want to make sure we accomplish our task tonight" (10).

Carrying talismans in the mind of Amadi's characters in *The Great Ponds* is a great event which allows villagers to be safe in case of war. The strong belief in charms forbids them sometimes to be realistic. Once a person owns a *gris-gris*, he thinks that he is invulnerable. Olumba's thought is not different. The reader can guess that the war will be lethal because Eziho's first sentence foreshadows it. If you see vultures in the sky, be sure that a corpse is lying around. Eziho wants to say that many persons will die during that war over the great ponds.

To show that it is a battle of talismans the Ikwerre novelist has closed the above reported speech with Olumba's self-confidence that his warriors and he will win the fight because of the efficient charm around his arm. Amadi puts forward the importance of charm for the simple reason that before the coming of the Whiteman in Africa, nothing was done without consulting the *Dibia*. Achichi, the *Dibia* of Chiolu, is introduced through his talisman by one of the main characters, Olumba: "This talisman round my neck is his [Achichi] handiwork. It is for protection and luck while travelling. In times of danger I simply vanish"(10). To make the reader keep the idea of vanishing in mind, the author gives a special power to Olumba in a narrative technique as follows:

"Now the edge of the great ponds was as far as a man could shoot an arrow. Olumba who was leading the company raised his hand and immediately the men disappeared without a sound... Olumba beckoned and the men reappeared" (11).

This narration has been done as if the men have vanished in the air. They simply hide themselves behind some bushes, because they have no charm for invisibility. A comparison is also used at the beginning of the quotation to show that the great ponds are near. "As far as a man could shoot an arrow", has double significances: First it indicates that the place is not far. Second it means that the enemy can shoot them down from that distance. So they have to be careful. That is why Olumba raises his hand to alert his men who camouflage themselves as quickly as a flash of lightning.

The writer uses the same technique to enumerate the different existing charms: “for fight, for travelling, against poisoning, for social gatherings, against evil spirits by night, against mischievous by day, for growing big yams, for wrestling, for fishing” (27). The enumeration of these different talismans proves that traditional beliefs play an important role in the lives of Black West Africans. The novelist describes the traditional life as closely as it is. That is why there is no complication in the style. He writes his fiction as simply as things happen. The explanation of how to release Olumba from this oath is made in these terms:

“An egg, some kola and two leaves from a special tree were procured and placed in a wooden bowl. The bowl was waved round Olumba’s head three times while Diali muttered some incantation” (25).

The way the artist explains the ceremony is quite simple and should be understandable by most of the readers. Characters such as Olumba cannot be said to be keenly devoted to the gods even though the novelist portrays him as a zealous worshipper. Olumba’s ambiguous position here does not allow the reader of Amadi’s *The Great Ponds* to decide whether this warrior is influenced by the oracle or charms. But the novelist’s insistence on the following paragraph can help the readers to know the author’s position: “The villagers feared Olumba not only because of his undisputed physical strength but also for his many and reputedly powerful charms” (27). According to the Ikwerre writer, the whole community in *The Great Ponds* is conditioned by the use of charms. The preparations for an eventual war over the pond of Wagaba demonstrate it:

“Charms for fighting were brought out dusted and strengthened by the appropriate rituals. Achichi the Dibia had the busiest day in this life. He ran from one compound to another, mending broken amulets, concocting new ones, prescribing quick and effective sacrifices, warding of evil influences, invoking the help of powerful gods...” (28).

Even great warriors are weak without any amulet. Olumba himself is amazed for not seeing his amulet against arrows. Nothing is forgotten once the men of Chiolu are going to guard the pond of Wagaba against marauders from Aliakoro. There is a charm that can make knives bounce off the body as off a rock. These varieties of talisman are introduced as the problem of the pond is growing from bad to worse. Wago, the leopard killer, chief warrior of Aliakoro, is introduced at the pond of Wagaba ready to fight. Like Olumba his opponent, his courage is enticed by the charms he is wearing. He is portrayed while rubbing his head with an amulet he wears round his neck. After this ritual, “he charged toward the enemy along the bank of the pond” (33). The advantage

of the talismans is that they are efficacious at that time. If an amulet is against arrows, even if there is a rain of arrows, none of them will touch the charm’s holder. The author confirms it in these lines:

“[Olumba] shot two arrows at the retreating figure. They went wide. He knew he was wasting his arrow since Wago evidently had the arrow-deflecting amulet. He stopped shooting and watched his enemy until the primeval woods swallowed him” (35).

“Swallowed” here is used to personify the “primeval woods”. It seems that these woods are like persons eating pounded yam with *okro* soup. If Wago has not got the arrow deflecting amulet, he will likely be killed, or seriously wounded. Reliable *gris-gris* are needed before going to the battlefield. Sometimes famous warriors lose their temper when they misplace their talisman when war is declared to their village. In *The Great Ponds*, Amadi portrays the tribal wars and the whole traditional Ikwerre’s life before independence as one that was conditioned by charms. When Aliakoro people want to kidnap Ochomma the oldest lady of the village and her grandsons, they use a sleeping charm- a charm which makes a person sleep a lot. The writer describes the scene artfully: “One night invaders from Aliakoro pitched on Ochomma’s house to induce a deep death-like sleep on the occupants” (74). On the same occasion the authors informs the reader that there is a counter- charm- a charm done to neutralize another charm:

“But Ochomma was not asleep. The charm of the marauders did not affect her own charms, coupled with the mysterious powers which her great age had conferred on her, kept her awake”(74).

Apart from the counter -charm, Ochomma is also protected by her status as an elderly woman. The most wonderful thing in Amadi’s description of the traditional religion is the use of the third kind of charm, which is an anti-counter-charm. The anti-counter-charm is a talisman used to destroy the counter-charm. So we come back to the initial position- the sleeping charm reinforced by the anti-counter-charm is described as follows:

“...An overwhelming smell sickly and sweet filled the room. Ochomma fell asleep almost instantly. Okatu [Ochomma’s thirteen year-old grandson] struggled a little longer to keep awake. Eventually he slumped to the ground and slept” (74).

Amadi works out well the stylistic devices in Okatu and Ochomma’s granddaughter. The narration is so easy that the reader feels he is living the scene. The latest detail is not forgotten. The way he explains the use of amulets is simple and tidy, supported by a perpetual use of proverbs. These sayings are typical of the environment in

which the scene is taking place. They are used to remind readers that they are in African context, and that English language can be modelled according to the African writer's will in order to express a typical African thought. Proverbs such as "It is good to eat and be satisfied but it is foolish to eat until one's stomach burst", "When one finger picks up oil the others soon get soiled with it", "When two cocks are tired of fighting a mosquito flying between them is enough to stop them", are used to attract people's common sense. They serve as a moral because a lesson is drawn from them.

Proverbs are not the only ingredient used in the African culture. Incantations in a song form are also used to perform the religious practice. Even the swearing ceremony is made in songs. The priest talks about strange charms or witchcraft because he knows that the opponents can use unknown talisman or sorcery to harm the person under oath. If this prevention has not been made, the enemies could use a foreign charm stronger than the local one to kill Olumba.

Even though everything required by the customs is made to protect Olumba, the person under oath, the enemies of Chiolu continue to fight them with charms. Wago the chief warrior of Aliakoro wants to eliminate Olumba through talisman, in order to own the litigious pond. When Igwu the *Dibia* refuses to help Wago to destroy the person under oath, Aliakoro's chief warrior challenges the seer of being untrustworthy. Wago even declares the uselessness of the charms. His statement is controversial: he says "Igwu's talismans are useless and he begs him to make a *gris- gris* against Olumba, the opponent" (108). The outcome of the fights is the victory of Chiolu villagers over those from Aliakoro. Ogbunabali has settled the matter. The king of the night drives Wago, Aliakoro's chief warrior, to commit suicide. He drowns himself in the contentious pond so that it will be no longer useful to both sides. Wago's death is symbolic. It puts an end to the tribal war on one hand, and it also puts an end to an era which has marked the development of charms. These charms are effective because Wago challenges a *Dibia*, he falls sick. He cannot eat, and "his sleep is one long nightmare" (111).

The thing to be kept in mind is that charms, *Dibias*, priests, oracles and the gods are parts of the black West African traditions. All these components constitute the ancestral religion. These constituents are linked together by the same rope which is called unity and faith. Traditional religious beliefs are characterized by their singularity. Villages and entire clans share the same shrines, the same religion. There is no diversity of faith. Everybody believes in the same gods and every person in difficulty consults the same priests. *Gris- gris* represent a kind of iron shell of protection in the mind of the bearers. Traditional religion is thus unique and involves everybody in the clan: before the coming of the missionaries, children, youngsters, adults and elders, believed there was no other religion which could overthrow theirs. The diviner was also an important

person. Amadi confirms it, by saying that even the chief of the village, the Eze Okehi, recognizes Igwu's strength when it comes to the supernatural :

"He [Igwu] is a *Dibia* and when it comes to the supernatural we have to accord him due respects..." (111).

In both *The Concubine* and *The Great Ponds*, Amadi makes a plea for the ancestral religion, especially the use of charms and psychic forces of *Dibias*, to exalt the wonderfulness of Africa. There is indeed something mystical and mythical in the African ancestral religion. This religion is not only a religion of preaching, imploring and worshipping the gods. It is a religion in which the gods participate in the day to day life. They are present any time they are needed, and they are actors in the taking of the clan's decisions, through their shrines and their priests. For that, Amadi said in *The Great Ponds*:

"There was much to be said for having a god's shrine in a village. It made the god seem less remote. Its priest worked among the people expounding its mysteries, and letting people know the right time for the various sacrifices" (130).

The African traditional religion can be qualified as flexible and useful. In *The Concubine* and *The Great Ponds*, Elechi Amadi insists on the *Dibias* and the use of charms because the African ancestral religion is not dogmatic; every god is represented in the clan and has its specific role. As soon as a god becomes powerless, it is dismissed.

Conclusion

To conclude, one can say that the use of charms in Amadi's novels reinforce the idea that African communities were not mindless before the coming of the Whiteman. They were well organized and their culture among the best, because it intervened on different aspects of the day-to-day life. The use of charms is part of the expression of the African culture and civilization. Since African writers are fighting against colonial prejudice of *tabula rasa* - Africa is a dark continent and Africans are ignorant- they have to show how their tradition is manifested. That is one of the reasons which lead Amadi to portray African traditional religion positively in his writings.

REFERENCES

- Achebe C (1956). London: Heinemann.
 Amadi E (1966). *The Concubine*. London: Heinemann.
 Amadi E (1982). *The Great Ponds*. London: Heinemann.
 Idigbe BNA (1985). *Tragic Vision in Elechi Amadi, Chinua Achebe and John Munonye*. Unpublished M.A. Thesis. Zaria.

Kane CH (1963). *The Ambiguous Adventure*. London: Walker and Company.
Osundare N (1980). *As Grasshoppers to Wanton Boys: The Role of the Gods in the Novels of E. Amadi*". *African Literature Today* N°1. E. D. Jones, ed. London: Heinemann.

Taiwo O (1967). *An Introduction to West African Literature*. Lagos: Thomas Nelson.