

# WHEN PLACES ARE MORE THAN MERE SETTINGS IN AFRICAN LITERATURE

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## RÉSUMÉ

Cet article analyse le rôle majeur du cadre (milieu) dans les œuvres de la littérature africaine, précisément celle issue de la culture Ibo. Les cadres symboliques sélectionnés pour être analysés sur le plan symbolique sont: le village, le vestibule, l'arène (ou la place publique) du village, le marché et la forêt. Les différentes illustrations sont toutes extraites de l'ouvrage de Chinua Achebe intitulé *Things Fall Apart* (le Monde s'Effondre) et de ceux d'Elechi Amadi the *Great Ponds* (les Grands Lacs), *The Concubine* (la Maîtresse), et *Weep not Child* (les désolations de l'Enfant Africain).

**Mots-clés** : cadre, Ibo, culture, littérature

## ABSTRACT

This paper analyses the outstanding importance of setting in African Literature, precisely that which finds its background in the Ibo culture. The places which symbolic meanings' are discussed in this paper are: the village, the reception hall, the arena, the market place, and the forest. The various illustrations are all extracts from Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Amadi Elechi's *the Great ponds*, *The Concubine* and *Weep not Child*.

**Keywords**: setting, Ibo, culture, literature

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Works by Achebe and Amadi are full of settings and the use of this device is key in understanding the social and cultural life of Ibo people. The work discusses the importance of: the village, the reception hall, the arena, the forest and the market.

For instance, the importance of the village is made explicit by Achebe like when Okonkwo the protagonist in *Things Fall Apart* places his village in the heart of his life. He proudly defended his village and strived to maintain its pride and sense of freedom when the settlers' messenger came to ask the assembly of the men of Umuofia to stop their meeting. They had gathered to decide what position they had to adopt towards the colonizers after the release of their six men that had been arrested. "In a flash Okonkwo drew a matchet. The messenger crouched to avoid the blow. It was useless. Okonkwo's matchet descended on him twice and the man's head lay beside his uniformed body" (163).

The market place is another setting that is present in Achebe's work.

The rally of Umofians' men after Okonkwo and five other men's arrest and release to decide what new attitude and policy have vis -a vis the settlers took place in the market place . *"The market place began to fill as soon as the sun rose"* (160).

When the missionaries came to Umuofia, the market place was the first setting where they settled before being accommodated in the village. *"The missionaries spent their first four or five nights in the market place, and went into the village in the morning to preach the gospel"* (119).

The forest is a setting that is central in Achebe. When missionaries came to Umuofia, the villagers did not give them a plot of ground within the village but they had them settle in a forest they called the Evil Forest because they would throw away twins there because twins were regarded as babies of ill-omen by Umuofians. *"When one came to think of it, the Evil Forest was a fit home for such undesirable People"* (124).

Elechi Amadi's work highlights the reception hall as a central setting. In the great Ponds, the reception hall is the setting of official meetings under the guidance of village chiefs (Ezes).

When the village of Aliakoro experienced the abduction of some of its inhabitants, the chief of the village Eze Okehi summoned an emergency meeting to his reception hall to inform the men of the village about what had happened and then make a series of decisions about the issue. *"Eze Okehi sat at one end of his hall surrounded by his elders. It was the reversal of the situation in Chiolu's arena and Eze Okehi felt elated"* (66).

The arena is a very important setting among Ibo and is central in Amadi's work. The first time when Aliakoro people led by their chief Eze Okehi went to Chiolu to negotiate the release of two boys from their village, the gathering was held in the arena: *"within a short time, the arena was filled with men"* (152).

## 2. LITERARY REVIEW

Setting is a literary device essential in literature in general and in African Literature in particular. Setting and theme are integral and interrelated elements of a novel. Events in any literary work turn around patterns of ideas, which weave a whole work into a coherent and unified body. Many specialists of literature strived to define setting. Roberts and Jacobs define setting as "the natural and artificial scenery of environment in which characters in literature live and move, together with the things they use" (229).

These environments include, among others, the time of the day, conditions of the sun and clouds, weather, hills, valleys, trees, animals, as well as smell and sound, light, darkness, rain, or any other thing referring to or affecting the atmosphere or the mood of the narratives, or requiring additional sensory responses from the reader. In this respect, the setting of George Orwell's *Animal Farm* is not only Mr. Jones' farm.

The fact that he was most often drunk and which fact made him regularly forget to feed his animals accounted for the animals' attempt to start a revolution. When that situation endured, the animal's revolution began one cold night. From that point, one can state that the farm, the night, Mr. John's drunkenness, animals' hunger, determine the course of events in the novel, and become important elements of the novel's setting. But, the most important components of setting are space and time.

As for Borneuf and Ouellet, they give more importance to time than space. They state that time is an element capable changing the significance of a book. They divide space or milieu into what they call a narrow space and a large space, and recognize the existence in contemporary fiction of a particularly hostile environment, which often limits the movements of characters to a strict minimum, and which is often narrow. The farm, which is the only spatial setting of Orwell's *Animal Farm*, is a good illustration of this type of space. Animals spend their whole life on that small farm, trying to fight energetically natural and human forces, but ending

up not achieving any permanent improvement in their life. It is a general feature of the oppressive space to generate hatred or revolt in the mind of characters. An oppressive setting can take different forms: a refugee camp, a concentration camp, a besieged town, a police station, a desert, a prison. ....

In Antoine de Saint Exupery's *Vol de Nuit*, for instance, the sky becomes so hostile to Fabien, the pilot that even a struggle for survival against the challenging wind, night, desert and mountains fails: he disappears in thin air. Prison is an oppressive setting par excellence. Alex la Guma's *the Stone Country* provides relevant illustrations of the humiliations, moral, physical and psychological abuses which prisoners suffer under South African Apartheid regime.

In the light of what is said above, it becomes obvious that setting is the foundation of each literary work. Setting consists of: place, time, climate, context, but the backbone of it is the place.

In African literature the setting is most often related to the reception hall, the arena, the village, the forest. And, the night, the twilight, the daytime and dawn are the moments of the happening of events.

### 3. THEORY

The theory chosen for this research study is Cultural Criticism and Literature in Lois Tyson's work entitled *Critical Theory Today* (2007). According to Tyson, for critical critics, a literary text, or any other kind of cultural production performs cultural work to the extent to which it shapes the cultural experience of those who encounter it. That is, to the extent to which it shapes our experience as members of a cultural group. Tyson quotes Stephan Greenblatt (2007) who says that the following questions can help us begin to examine the kinds of cultural work performed by a literary text:

1. What kinds of behaviour, what models of practice does the work seem to enforce?
2. Why might readers at a particular time and place find this work compelling?
3. Are there differences between my values and the values implicit in the work I am reading?
4. Upon what social understanding does the work depend?
5. Whose freedom of thought or movement might be constrained implicitly or explicitly by this work?
6. What are the larger social structures with which these particular acts of praise or blame, that is, the text's apparent ethical orientation might be connected?

In Africa, places are not perceived as mere pieces of land or buildings etc. The first symbolic place that we are interested in is the village.

#### 4.1. THE VILLAGE

People's villages are the places where they have their umbilical cords buried. It means that they feel attached to those spots for ever.

Usually, in Africa, when someone evokes his village, he means the village of his father. Yet, the mother's village is extremely important and symbolic too.

#### 4.2. THE SYMBOLIC MEANING OF ONE'S FATHER'S HOME VILLAGE: THE FATHERLAND

The Fatherland (the father's home village) is a symbol of pride.

All through in *Things Fall Apart*, the fatherland is what makes up people's pride. The men in Umuofia, Okonkwo as the figurehead were always striving to bring prosperity and betterment to their community. They never spoke, worked or decided anything without referring to the greatness of their forefathers.

When the Western invaders got into Umuofia, Okonkwo stood as a bulwark to protect his village and its

customs passed on to them by their ancestors. To Okonkwo, the fatherland was worth being fought for. Likewise, its loss and the downfall of its culture were synonymous with the end of its civilisation (the Ibo Civilisation). When, he understood that his people were losing what constitutes the essence of life (the culture and the fatherland), he chose to kill himself rather than live under the dominion of alien people. *“Then they came to the tree from which Okonkwo’s body was dangling, and they stopped dead”* (164).

Pride felt for the home village (the father’s village) is exemplified in *The Great Ponds* too. Elechi Amadi describes how passionate the characters from Chiolu and Aliakoro are when it comes to matters concerning their respective villages.

On the one hand, there is Olumba who is always determined to kill or be killed to defend the interests of the village as when he leads several battles to protect the pond of Wagaba against those they call poachers. He even swears on behalf of his village that the pond is theirs. He took a great risk for he could have been killed at any time by the fearful god Ogbunabali, the god that kills by night: *“I swear by Ogbunabali the god of the night that the pond of Wagaba belongs to Chiolu. If this is not true, let me die within six months; if true, let me live and prosper”* (86).

On the other hand, we have Wago the leopard-killer. When, he (Wago) understood that his village Aliakoro was about to forfeit the much coveted pond of Wagaba, he decided to commit a suicide in the pond. That way, he thought, the pond would be lost for all. Because, as Amadi put it, in the Erekwu clan, legend had it that a pond or river in which a man decided to kill himself had to be abandoned for ever: *“it is said in their clan that it is an abomination to anyone to fish in a pond where suicide has been committed”* (192) *ibid*.

The father land is the pride in Africa, but the motherland is symbolic too.

### **4.3. THE SYMBOLS FOUND IN ONE’S MOTHER’S VILLAGE: THE MOTHERLAND**

The mother land (one’s mother’s home village) symbolises hope.

The motherland or somebody’s mother’s village is very symbolic not as much as the fatherland, but it is of paramount importance too. When, a man faces tough and difficult situations in his fatherland, he takes the destination of his motherland.

In *Things Fall Apart*, Ezeudu’s death plunges the village of Umuofia into a deep sadness. The entire Umuofian community pays him a last tribute, and they do it with gunshots. Then, Okonkwo’s gun explodes accidentally and kills someone. As it is the rule in their custom, when a man kills a kinsman, he must leave the village and be banned from it for seven years. They see it as a crime against the earth god “Ani” (female god of fertility, the judge of morality and conduct) who is in close communion with the departed fathers of the clan (the ones whose bodies are buried under the earth). Because, he is forced to leave the beloved homeland (the Fartherland), he seeks refuge in Mbanta, his mother’s native village. He is welcomed by his uncle who receives him with warmth and enthusiasm and then his uncle says words related to the importance of one’s motherland. According to Okonkwo’s uncle, *“It’s true that a child belongs to his father. But, when a father beats his child, it seeks sympathy in his mother’s hut. A man belongs to his fatherland when things are good and life is sweet. But, when there is sorrow and bitterness he finds refuge in his motherland. Your mother is there to protect you. She is buried there. And, that is why we say that mother is supreme...”* (107).

Another importance of the motherland is made explicit in chapter five (*Ibid*), when Okonkwo’s wives get very happy with the advent of the new yams festival, when their relations from their motherlands are expected to be present at the feast.

After the importance of the fatherland and the motherland, our next symbolic place is the arena.

### 5.1. VARIOUS SYMBOLS FOUND IN CONNECTION WITH THE ARENA

The arena is the public place of the village. It is generally located in the centre of the village. The arena is chosen to host the meetings that cannot be held in the chief's reception hall. The Arena is so symbolic to each inhabitant of the village.

### 5.2. THE ARENA TO HOST A CLAN OR VILLAGE GATHERING

In *The Great Ponds*, the two prisoners Chileru and Ejimole caught on the eve at the pond of Wagaba are presented to the assembly of men that consists of elders, warriors and the medicine man (the dibia).

On the following day, the men from Aliakoro went to Chiolu to get a deal for the release of the two boys. Such negotiations are held in front of the entire village. The visitors came also in mass, so much so that, it became out of question to think of holding the meeting in Eze Diali's reception hall. So, given the great number of the visitors, it became indispensable to gather in the arena which is the only setting suitable for such situations. *"within a short time the arena was filled with men. They stood around the two captives whose embarrassment was mounting every moment. They had not expected this. Diali came forward and cleared his throat. Chiolu, meka!"*(17).

In *The Concubine* by Amadi Elechi, the arena is where all the villagers are called to be informed after the return of the search group sent to search for Ekwueme. That day, people were not informed singly or in twos, but they were all asked to show up at the arena where the chief would enlighten them about the search group's find (discovery). The centre of the village drew the crowd of villagers on the spot. Men and women turned up. And, the lost man's parents came in the first place. *"Wigwe and red-eyed Adaku came hurrying down with Nkechi their daughter trotting behind them. They searched the arena for Ekwueme but their sorrow deepened when their eyes were not set on their offspring. And, Wigwe his father added: 'he would die if he is not found after three days'"* (179).

But thankfully, their son was discovered at stones' throw from the village. He was found sitting on a branch of a tree not far from his trap set on the outskirts of their village. The agenda of the gathering was to inform people about whether Ekwueme (Ekwue as he was fondly nicknamed by villagers) was found or not. The chief judged it necessary to inform the parents first. And, the rest of the crowd was informed and their ovations and cheers filled up the arena.

The arena is also a place for entertainment and feasts. The arena is a place where village celebrations take place.

### 5.3. THE ARENA: A PLACE OF ENTERTAINMENT AND FEASTS

In *The Great Ponds*, the plot is about two warring villages: Chiolu and Aliakoro, which become opposed and want to finish each other off. A fierce battle opposes them and warriors display courage, bravery and stamina on both sides. A week time later, they assess the event and give the toll of casualties. The tolls indicate that Chiolu is the clear winner. So, as it is said among the Ibo that a victory after a battle must be celebrated, an important feast is organized and they call it the *Victory Dance*. The dance is for the warriors who made it in the battle field. It is sequenced in three steps: *the General Dance, the Highlights and the Oduma Dance*. *"The drums were beating. The elders were sitting round Eze Diali behind the drummers. The warriors were arriving one by one dressed as if for battle"*(44).

The *Victory Dance* took place in the arena and everybody was delighted with it.

In *The Concubine*, the arena is the place where all feasts, including singing and dancing take place. So many feasts took place there. But, there is one, which people remained mindful of. In fact, when Ekwueme recovered from 'his' mental illness, his singing group proposed a singing and dancing party to mark his coming back to normal life, since he was known as the main singer of the village along with his friend wakiri

the wag of the village and Mmam and Adiele the two drummers. People were all the more delighted that, in addition to his recovery, he was going to marry Ihuoma, the woman he had always dreamt of for wife. *"Most villagers were happy over the proposed marriage, and they said so in no uncertain terms"* (200).

That night, all those present enjoyed themselves with Ekwueme's songs produced by his 'nightingale' voice and the two drummers' beats. All the women present danced. But, one woman (Ihuoma) particularly danced. She danced all heart because, since a long time it was the first time that, she was going to be someone's wife after she had lost her first husband. She also danced because that dance was probably going to be the last in the period of her life that she was called a widow. She would soon be living in a hearth with a caring husband. The dance had a special tune to her, because the main singer was the man with whom she was about to share her daily life. *'Ekwueme sang with a new meaning in his voice'* (200) *Ibid.*

Ihuoma danced with tears in her eyes. In the dark arena, no one saw those tears and she did not bother to wipe them either. That night, to both Ekwueme and Ihuoma, the arena was not only symbolic for expressing their joys, but also served as a venue to testify in front of everybody, that they were back to life again and then, that they were resolute to fight and keep what had been their joyless life at bay and why not make it vanish for ever. *"Ihuoma danced with tears in her eyes. In the dark arena no one saw those tears and she did not bother to wipe them"* (201).

If the arena is so special, we can state that the same goes for the chief's reception hall.

## 6.1. THE CHIEF'S RECEPTION HALL

No society can be well organised without a chief. A society without a chief is an anarchic one. In the Erekwí clan the chief's reception hall is the place where decisions are made and also where disputes are settled.

### 6.2. The Chief's Reception Hall: a Place for Making Decisions

The chief's reception hall can be compared with the parliaments and presidential palaces of modern time. It is a place where important decisions are made and where tough negotiations are held. In *The Great Ponds*, Chiolu men invade Aliakoro and carry out abductions on their women and children as reprisals. Eze Okehi summons an emergency meeting in his reception hall and all the men turn up to have their say on the issue. They have unanimously made a decision about what should be the behaviour they should have or adopt to handle the case. *"Eze Okehi sat at one end of his hall surrounded by his elders. It was the reversal of the situation in Chiolu's arena and Eze Okehi felt elated"* (66).

In chapter sixteen of the novel (*Ibid.*), we notice that in Chiolu when turmoil struck all the minds because of the epidemic, voices raised here and there to ask for the withdrawal of Olumba's oath: *"the din was deafening in the reception hall"* (158). This was a difficult decision to make. In Eze Diali's reception hall, the decision was reluctantly made to dispatch men to Aliakoro to give up their claim over the ownership of the pond. It was like saying that they would surrender. Because, it was made in the chief's reception hall it became indisputable. We can understand here that the resolutions in the reception hall are similar to laws that are passed nowadays.

The same novel teaches us that when the men from Aliakoro returned to their village, Eze Diali summoned the men in his reception hall and together they decided that the struggle for the pond was worth being carried on. *"Diali gathered his men round him and said solemnly: (you all heard what Okehi said. You know the meaning of it. I want all the elders to meet me in my reception hall immediately we leave here..."* (26).

Examples of this kind are found in chapter four after Chiolu's victory over Aliakoro where the sequence of events concerning the battle was explained to the elders: *"when they arrived (Chiolu fighters) they were greeted with mounds of foofoo in Eze Diali's reception hall"* (36). The same instance is further discussed in chapter five. After the celebration of the Victory Dance, the Ikoro rang and everybody went to Eze Diali's

reception hall where Diali asked Olumba about what had to be done." *That evening, the Ikoro rang out again and Diali's reception hall filled with men*" (45).

Olumba, as the chief of warriors in Chiolu suggested that the war be continued. The proposal was adopted by all. The instances about the importance of the reception hall are countless. The reception hall is also a place where disputes are settled.

### **6.3. THE CHIEF'S RECEPTION HALL: A VENUE FOR SETTLING DISPUTES**

In addition to decision making, the chief's reception hall is also a venue for settling disputes.

*The Great Ponds* is full of such examples. For instance, representatives of Chiolu village moved to Aliakoro to negotiate the release of their relatives. The encounter was held in Eze Okehi's reception hall. It was clear that, even though the two parties did not clearly utter it, they wanted a peaceful agreement for once. So, Eze Okehi's reception hall served as a place for settling dispute that day: "*it was a strong argument and everyone saw the point. The Chiolu camp accepted the proposal*" (59).

The coming point about symbolism with places is with the market. This section is about the *market place and day*.

#### **7.1. THE MARKET PLACE**

The market place is so specific and so special to African people that they do not perceive that place just as a setting where business transactions or commercial exchanges are held. On the contrary, it is also regarded as a place of medicine, gathering and birthday, etc.

#### **7.2. THE MARKET PLACE: A SETTING FOR EXPERIMENTING A POWERFUL MEDICINE**

In Africa, the market place can be used to experiment a new medication, perform sacrifice or even bewitch people. Sometimes, when people are tempted to perform sacrifices to get fame for instance, they do it at the market place. The same thing is done in enchanting people to attract them in the field of business. In chapter twelve of *Things Fall Apart*, Obeirika goes to the market place of Umuike to buy a goat for his daughter's *Uri*. He was with three men to whom he explained that every day before the first cock crow, they make a powerful medicine stands on the market ground in the shape of a woman and it is as he said, that magic fan that pulls all of these people to come to their market because they want their market to grow and swallow up the market of their neighbours. "*The people of Umuike wanted their market to grow and swallow up the market of their neighbours. So, they made a powerful medicine*" (96).

#### **7.3. THE MARKET PLACE: A VENUE FOR PEOPLE'S GATHERING**

In chapter twenty two of *Things Fall Apart*, after Enoch had unmasked *Egwugwu* during the public ceremony which was held in honour of the Earth deity, that matter concerned everybody. It was understood as a blasphemy. So, the clan's members were on alert and they hastened to meet. "*On the next day all the masked Egwugwu of Umuofia assembled in the market place and some of them came from all quarters of the clan even from neighbouring villages to set the problem*" (149).

In chapter twenty three of *Things Fall Apart*, the people of Umuofia gather at the market place where Okonkwo talks and makes a violent speech in which he suggests that the missionaries be killed and all the christians driven away. "*He had spoken violently to his clansmen when they had met in the market place to decide on their action*" (153).

In the same chapter, the village crier calls the men of Umuofia to meet at the market place and decide to collect two hundred and fifty bags of cowries in order to set Okonkwo and his fellow prisoners free.

"The silence was broken by the village crier beating his sonorous Ogene. He called every man in Umuofia, from the Akakanma age group upwards, to a meeting in the market place after the morning meal" (156).

In chapter two (*ibid*), the people of Umuofia gather at the market because one of their women named Ezeugo has been killed at Mbaino without any apparent reason. First, a meeting was called to inform people (men) about what had happened. And then, a decision was to be made about the attitude that was to be adopted. By consensual agreement, they decided to dispatch an ultimatum to Mbaino immediately asking them to choose between war on the one hand, and on the other hand, the offer of a young man and a virgin as a compensation. "In the morning the market –place was full. There must have been about ten thousand men there, all talking in low voices" (9).

## 8.1. DIFFERENT MEANINGS OF THE FOREST IN AFRICAN LITERATURE

It is a symbolic and important place that can mean so many things, but two things will be dealt with here: its meaning as a place to perform sacrifices, and where war is prepared and crime committed.

## 8.2. THE FOREST: A PLACE TO PERFORM SACRIFICES

In *Things Fall Apart*, Okonkwo's child dies. In their then animist society, such an event was considered to be abnormal. Nevertheless, if it happened, it was dealt with in a particular way. So, the medicine man was sent for and when the latter examined the case, he suggested that the corpse be mutilated and buried in the evil forest so that something alike would never occur (happen) in the future. "The medicine -man then ordered that there should be no mourning for the dead child. He brought out a sharp razor out of his goatskin bag slung from his left shoulder, and began to mutilate the child. Then, he took it away to bury in the Evil Forest...." (62; 63).

Furthermore, it is related that the missionaries asked for a piece of land to settle and build their shrine. The clan's members offered them a portion of the *Evil Forest* and hoped that would be a cause of fulfilment of the sacrifice which they had made in order to get the missionaries dead; for they regarded Christians as the destroyers of their native religion and the offenders of their forefathers' deities. "An Evil forest; it was such a forest that the rulers of Mbanta gave to the missionaries" (119) *ibid*.

The next instance derives from *The Concubine* by Amadi Elechi, and is widely explained in the fourth chapter. It concerns a character named Emenike. In fact, following Emenike's illness as a result of the fight that opposed him to Madume, the latter was advised to perform sacrifices at the shrine of Amadioha. The shrine was located in a place called the *Sacred Woods*, which itself was situated in the forest. The aim of that was to get recovery and protection. As customary, his people offered sacrifices to Amadioha for help. Amadioha was the most fearful god. That sacrifice was to be performed for a special purpose: to seek help and protection for a very ill person. Inevitably, the sacrifice had to be performed in the Sacred Woods. That place being set in the heart of the forest, then, Emenike had to walk into the forest to reach that place. It was not usual for a young person to go to that place alone, especially if that one was sick. That is why, he got accompanied by a group of old men. The priest had earlier specified the items for the sacrifice. They included a bright-red cock and two fat yams which Emenike took on that day. He walked with the old men and went into the forest. Next to the Sacred Woods, there was a monument called the shrine. The shrine was the symbol of their god (Amadioha).

Amadi Elechi describes the surroundings of the Sacred Woods as follows: "Rank trees bordered the dark path. Some climbers were so thick they looked like ordinary trees. At the shrine absolute stillness reigned and it was quite cold as the high majestic roof of thick foliage, like a black rain cloud, cut off the sun completely. Even the wind could only play meekly among the undergrowth. The Shrine was at the foot of a massive silk cotton tree" (16).



In the first place, the sacrifice consisted in killing the cock brought by Emenike. They cut the cock's throat, and the cock twisted itself in a way that showed it was going to die for a special purpose. After that, a very big snake (it was the living image of Amadioha) was served. Amadi declares that: *'in a matter of seconds a huge grey serpent crawled out from behind the shrine and began to swallow its share of the feast'* (18).

That showed that the sacrifice was received by the god. Afterwards, they cooked the yams with the rest of the cock's flesh. The people present there ate the cooked yams and the bright-red cock. In fact, we should understand that such a dish was not eaten like an ordinary meal at home. It was a meal eaten as an act of belief and worship. It was yams and a cock shared with a 'deity' at the foot of the shrine of the most fearful god: let us say in a holy place. At this point, Amadi says: *'the god having been fed, the men fell on the remains of the feast'* (18).

In the light of this, we have been enlightened one more time about the fact that the forest is a very special place for performing sacrifices.

Another usefulness of the forest in the study is how it is a symbol in connection with war and crime. Or, we should clarify it in saying how and why it is symbolic in the preparation and doing war and committing crime.

### **8.3. THE FOREST: A SPOT TO PREPARE WAR AND COMMIT CRIME**

We begin this part of the section with samples found in *The Great Ponds* by Amadi Elechi.

In the first chapter, Eze Diali sends warriors led by Olumba to the forest that surrounds the pond of Wagaba. The story of the pond has been largely explained in the previous lines. At night, scouts among whom Ikechi (the youngest warrior among Chiolu's fighters) have been dispatched to lie in ambush deep in the forest. The position they held was so good and strategic for they were out of their enemies' sight, but could see anyone coming onward or toward them. On that day, they defeated their opponents and made prisoners. *'Great forests loomed ahead. The dying rays of the sun failed to pierce the smoky haze enveloping them....'* (10).

The same novel tells us more. The misunderstanding about the true owner of the pond became apparent and following Aliakoro's dauntless determination to keep fishing in the pond, warriors from Chiolu waited for Wago the leopard-killer and his men one more time in the forest. The result was death from both sides even though, the victory was on Chiolu's side. *'At the pond, the men of Chiolu laid in ambush. The huge trees provided very good cover. The plan was simple but effective. If the men of Aliakoro moved in to fish they would be greeted with a volley of arrows, and killed or captured in the ensuing confusion'* (31).

The chapter cited above contains another good illustration. In fact, after Chiolu had captured two poachers from Aliakoro and made them prisoners, the condition set for their release was the payment of ransoms. The village of the poachers (Aliakoro) refused to pay the ransom in the first place. But, when they realized that there was no other way but paying, they were compelled to pay. They felt that as an unfair treatment because they considered themselves to be the right owners of the pond, just like their opponents did. So, being obliged to pay ransoms for fishing in a pond that they regarded as theirs was merely disproportioned to them, and they expressed their disagreement about the way their adversaries handled the case. They had no other way out but pay the ransom on that day.

Yet, they made it clear that they were not going to give up their claim over the ownership of the pond simply because two boys from their village had been captured fishing in a pond that another village was claiming as theirs too. So, they meant that they could also accuse the village of Chiolu of the same thing that Chiolu was blaming them for. Clearly, the capture of the two boys and having the village of Aliakoro pay ransoms (these two situations) were in no way going to serve as a deterrent preventing Aliakoro from claiming its rightful ownership of the pond, nor exercise their right of fishing unhindered. Finally, Aliakoro paid the ransoms, but the chief of Aliakoro Eze Okehi clearly stated to Eze Diali, his counterpart from Chiolu that

they would pay the ransoms of course but he drew the attention of his interlocutor on the fact that that he and his village were doing that just to get the freedom (release) of their sons (the two boys captured at the Pond of Wagaba Chileru and Ejimole) and that it was not going to be the beginning of their acceptance to withdraw their claim.

To convince his vis-a-vis that he was a fearless and even a foolhardy leader, he promised to send his people to the pond the next day, regardless the consequences. The other side (Chiolu) said that they would be waiting for them in the surroundings of the pond and that they would hold their ground firm. Unfortunately, both sides kept their promises in turning up the following day.

Aliakoro villagers (warriors) came and fought with the stamina that was theirs. But, the fighters opposite them (Chiolu fighters) were much more beyond them in terms of fierceness, preparation and strategy. With the indescribable commitment of Chiolu warriors, their Aliakoro enemies got soon defeated, and they were given the only possibility of running away. The war took place in the forest surrounding the pond. " *They dodged trees and undergrowth with uncanny dexterity and quickly increased the distance between them and their pursuers*"(34).

As it is specified in the headline above, the forest is symbolic for preparations of war but also for committing ritual crimes that are presented as sacrifices. A good example is found in *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe.

We discover that the fate of the child Okonkwo was entrusted with would change when the oracle decided that he (the child) had to be killed. His killing would serve as a compensation for another crime that happened before and perpetrated by the child's kinsmen. It was obvious and according to the guidelines that the child had to be slaughtered in the forest. So, one morning, the innocent child was led (taken to the forest) in the company of his guardian (tutor) Okonkwo whom he hitherto regarded as his second father.

Surprisingly, the man (Okonkwo), who was expected to be the first person to defend and protect him, was in fact the striker of the fatal blow that killed the lad deep down in the forest. " *The footway had now become a narrow line in the heart of the forest...dazed with fear; Okonkwo drew his machet and cut him down. He was afraid of being thought weak*"(47).

In *Weep not Child* by Ngugi Wa Thiong'O we learn about a resisting group called the Mau Mau at the beginning of chapter eleven. The group was a rebellious one fighting for the getting back of their ancestral land they had been dispossessed of by British settlers who deprived them of it and took possession of what (the land) an African man is the most proud of after his father's name: the land. So, depriving him of this symbolic thing is equal to killing something very deep in him; something he is unable to explain but which he knows he must fight for, the same way he fights to preserve the shrines of his gods, the totems of his clan, the traditions of his community, the honour of his family, the dignity of his wives and the pride of his fellows.

The Mau Mau uprising, also known as the Mau Mau rebellion was a military conflict that took place in British Kenya between 1952 and 1960. It involved Kikuyu-dominated groups known as Mau Mau, the white settlers, and service men of the British Army, including the local Kenyan Regiment, which in great part consisted of the British auxiliaries, anti-Mau Mau kikuyu.

The uprising created a rift between the European colonial community and the metropole, but also resulted in violent divisions within the kikuyu community.

During all the clashes that opposed the warring groups, the forest was a so strategic place in war plans and killings.

The Mau Mau represented in the novel by Boro retreated in the forest to carry out their strategies.

For the British people too, it was the right place to kill the so-called rebels.

‘It was said that some European soldiers were catching people at night, and having taken them to the forest would release them and ask them to find their way back home. But, when their backs were turned they would be shot dead in cold blood. The next day, this would be announced as a victory over the Mau Mau’ (79).

So, both clashes and even victory were connected to the forest.

In *The Concubine* by Amadi Elechi in the first chapter, the forest is the place of the fight that opposes Madume to Emenike.

Emenike and Madume are two characters in *The Concubine*. A land issue was the matter of their misunderstanding. First, they misunderstood each other in the village and the villagers unanimously sided with Emenike to whom they said the plot of ground in question belonged. Emenike’s good reputation had something to do with the villagers’ judgement. Yet, in spite of the support which he got, Emenike lost his composure and spoke his mind about Madume whom he labeled as ‘a dishonest land-grabber’ (1).

After that, Madume absolutely remained furious both as a result of the fierce exchange of words that he had with Emenike, and the humiliation inflicted on him by the villagers who decided between him and Emenike in an ephemeral judgement (judging). He felt as though all the villagers were waiting for an opportunity to express their disapproval of his personality and manners. With such devastating anger in mind and heart, Madume promised to Emenike that he would get it over with him. So, one day when both men went into the forest, it became inevitable for them to come face to face. They met and the irreparable occurred. The fight that was dreaded by the whole village finally happened. Amadi describes the regrettable scene in these words: ‘Madume leaped for a flying tackle. His opponent sank on one knee, collected him on his shoulders and flung him heavily to the ground. Emenike disengaged himself and waited; he would not close in yet. Madume got up and decided to come to grips with his man. For several minutes they pushed each other about treading down bushes like antelopes caught in a rope trap’ (2).

The struggle took place in the forest indeed because the forest was mentioned on the previous page and it is said this: ‘Emenike was walking in the forest when he heard someone cough ahead of him’ (1).

Here, in *The Concubine* just like in *Weep not Child*, it is obvious that the forest is presented as a place of clash, fight, war, killing ... thus it is a venue that symbolizes danger, injury and death.

## CONCLUSION

This research has shown that the two authors make use of setting in their works selected to conduct this study and that the geographical aspect (the setting) is a clue that leads to the understanding of their respective works. No matter what theme these two writers deal with, their Ibo cultural background is always pointed out. The places that they highlight in their works and some of which we selected prove enough that the Ibo society is very well organized and that each event is celebrated or organized in a very particular setting.

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