

Retheorising The *Pharmakos*: The *Nso* Concept in Narratives Of The Igbo Of Nigeria

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Summary

Narratives written by Nigerians of the Igbo ethnic stock – those of Chinua Achebe, Buchi Emecheta, and others – have been read by critics as positing postcolonial and socio-cultural issues, thanks to Euro-Western theoretic lenses. However, there is more to these – the presence of the *pharmakos* figure, whose suffering is in excess of his sin or contrasts his (near) innocence. The *pharmakos* theory always undertakes to weigh a character's punishment against his sin, with the consequence that a certain degree of innocence ends up being imputed to him. Therefore this article, in deploying such *pharmakos* sub-concepts as the mob, violence and persecution-inducing identification marks, will attempt to bring this figure to the centre of retributive suffering through the indigenous idea of *nso*. *Nso* (inexactly translated into English as “taboo” or “abomination”) is the code of order in the Igbo cosmology as ordained by the Earth goddess, Ani/Ala, which when broken beckons on sentence and transforms the seeming innocent personage into the guilty. This article will seek to rehabilitate the conventional *pharmakos* theory by opening up considerably the possibility of the *pharmakos* being suitably requited within the existing logic of persecution and suffering as an innocent, or not too guilty, figure. Following insights from the analysis of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*, this work will fundamentally contribute to the overlooked direction of complementing Western critical tools with indigenous methods in reading Nigerian or African literature.

Opsomming

Verhale wat deur Nigeriërs van die Igbo- etniese stam geskryf is – dié uit die pen van Chinua Achebe, Buchi Emecheta, en ander – is deur kritici gelees as die postulering van postkoloniale en sosiokulturele kwessies, danksy Euro-Westerse teoretiese beskouings. Daar is egter meer daaraan – die teenwoordigheid van die *pharmakos*-figuur, wie se lyding meer as sy sonde is, of sy (amperse) onskuld kontrasteer. Die *pharmakos*-teorie onderneem altyd om 'n karakter se straf teen sy sonde op te weeg, met die gevolg dat 'n sekere mate van onskuld op die ou end aan hom toegeskryf word. Daarom probeer hierdie artikel – deur middel van *pharmakos*-subkonsepte soos die menigte, geweld en identifiseringsmerke wat aanleiding gee tot vervolging – om hierdie figuur die middelpunt van vergeldingslyding te maak deur die inheemse gedagte van *nso*. *Nso* (losweg in Engels vertaal as “taboe” of “gruwel”) is die ordevoorskrifte in die Igbo-kosmologie, soos bepaal deur die Aarde-godin, Ani/Ala,

wat op vonnis afstuur wanneer dit oortree word, en wat die oënskynlik onskuldige persoon die skuldige maak. Hierdie artikel probeer om die konvensionele *pharmakos*-teorie te herstel deur die moontlikheid dat die *pharmakos* op gepaste wyse vergeld word in die bestaande logika van vervolging en lyding as 'n onskuldige figuur (of een wat nie té skuldig is nie), aansienlik te verbreed. Na aanleiding van insigte van die ontleding van Achebe se *Things Fall Apart* en Emecheta se *The Joys of Motherhood*, sal hierdie werk in wese bydra tot die oorgesiene rigting waarin Westerse kritiese hulpmiddels aangevul word met inheemse metodes in die lees van Nigeriese of Afrika-literatuur.

Narratives written by Nigerians of the Igbo ethnic stock, those of Chinua Achebe, Buchi Emecheta, and others have been read by critics as positing postcolonial and socio-cultural issues, thanks to Euro-Western theoretic lenses. However, there is more to these – the presence of the *pharmakos* figure, whose suffering is in excess of his sin or contrasts his (near) innocence. Since the *pharmakos* theory always undertake to weigh a character's punishment against his sin, with the consequence that a certain degree of innocence ends up being imputed to him, this article, in deploying such *pharmakos* sub-concepts as the mob, violence and persecution-inducing identification marks, will attempt to bring this figure to the centre of retributive suffering through indigenous thought of *nso*. Often inexactly translated into English as “taboo” or “abomination” in that it embraces *aru* (abomination) and *ochu* (manslaughter/murder), and other sundry prohibitions, *nso* is the code of order in the Igbo cosmology as ordained by the Earth goddess, *Ani/Ala*, which when broken beckons on sentence and transforms the seeming innocent personage into the guilty. Narratives absorb these. Cashing in on the already *pharmakosian* paradoxical feature of saintliness and sinfulness and guilt and innocence, this article will seek to rehabilitate the conventional *pharmakos* theory by opening up considerably the possibility of the *pharmakos* being suitably requited within the existing logic of persecution and suffering as an innocent, or not too guilty, figure. It is hoped that, following insights from the analysis of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*, this work will fundamentally contribute to the need of complementing Western critical tools with indigenous methods, an over-looked direction, in reading African/Nigerian literature.

Rethorising the *Pharmakos*: The *Nso* Concept in Igbo Nigerian Narratives

The capacity to reason symbolically, and hence, via cosmological prisms, is not the Igbo's alone. It cuts across the main tribal nations of Nigeria, though of great importance owing to their populations and rich cultural heritage are: the Igbo, Yoruba, and Hausa. Igbo is the tribe of Chinua Achebe, Flora

Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta, Chimamanda Adichie, and an impressive horde of novelists of international repute. In Igbo, three spheres of divinities exist: *elu-igwe*, where the Supreme God and major deities are; *Ala*, where the Earth goddess – *Ala* – minor deities, patron spirits, nature spirits, cosmic forces inhabit; and *Ala-mmuo*, the underworld hosting the ancestors, numerous other spirits, and nature forces (Kalu 2002: 353). The Igbo believe there is “an intense and continual traffic of the various categories of spiritual beings from one plane to another” (353). Their decrees must be scrupulously obeyed in order to maintain the dynamic equilibrium existing between the various spheres of Igbo cosmic perception. (356). Such decrees are in form of ethical beliefs and practices, morals, norms and taboos (hereafter as *nso*), respect for divinities as *Ala*, the Earth goddess (Ezikeojiaku 2008: 38).

Of all deities, *Ala* is supreme, for she is the Earth goddess and guardian of Igbo morality, while the ancestors somehow function as messengers in looking into how best to preserve moral laws (Aneh 1993: 3). *Ala*’s all-encompassing moral code categorically specifies what must not be done, *nso-Ala* (the Earth’s *nso* and *aru*). When broken, this misconduct must be redressed and cleansed by the offender to restore the community to the pre-*nso* state, or the whole community suffers the impending wrath of the Earth goddess (Ezeanua 1998: 1; Uchendu 1982: 10; Okobi 2003: 14; Eneh 1986: 4; Agulue 1989: 2). Moral misconduct is atoned for in many instances in two ways: “a restitution or compensation may be prescribed as part of the religious dimension form of ritual acts of expiation, *ikpu aru*, cleansing of abomination in its different categories in traditional Igboland” (356). For the above reason, *nso* would denote the conception of the forbidden arising in contravention of the god’s code(s) in as much as the prohibited is consensually agreed to have far-reaching implications for the individual and his community and that it be atoned for in traditional Igbo society, whether done voluntarily or not.

However, Agulue adds that *nso* and *aru* as “taboo” and “abomination” do not seem to articulate adequately the full semantic indication in English of the forbidden in Igbo. She suggests a further elaboration in lexis to include acting it out in the nominalised lexical item such as: *ime aru/alu* (doing abomination); *ime nso* (doing *nso* – taboo); and *ime ife obodo na so* (doing what the community forbids) (3). These specify the attachment of the verb *do* to *nso*, a noun. Moreover, “taboo” and “abomination” are but the nearest equivalent to *nso*, as taboo is a Polynesian loan-word (Okobi 2003: 7). Because *nso* is cosmology-based; has no authentic English word; always connoting the authority of the divine; and also resists plural marker and perfect translation in English, this work will resort to this authentic Igbo term in descriptive and interpretive intentions of this essay.

Nso includes but is not limited to such willful acts, major ones being theft; incest; adultery; murder; termination of pregnancy – “*imebi ime*” (Agulue 1989: 17); sale of one’s kindred member into slavery (Agulue 1989: 19);

suicide; arson; a widow having sexual relations while mourning her husband; (minor *nso*) – altering boundaries in secret; cutting down somebody else’s tree(s); eating of community totem (Eneh 1986: 12); inability to keep secret (19); disclosure of masquerade’s identity to non-initiates, especially to women; a freeborn, son of the soil (*diala*) marrying an *osu* (outcast dedicated to a god); a woman climbing a palm tree and others; and unintentional acts, namely, delivering twins; baby cutting the upper teeth first (23); baby coming out of its mother’s womb with legs first (24); woman dying with pregnancy (24); one dying of a dreaded disease like leprosy, smallpox, swollen stomach and others, cutting across social, anthropological, and religious spheres of the Igbo world are not just mere constructions, but evidences of the cosmological propensity in man to think of his environment in symbolic and imagistic worlds. Thus, we come close to glimpsing at the overwhelming impact on the various structures of society, including literature, where *nso* is clearly manifest at some submerged depth from where critics could uncover it and make it serve as a schema for interpreting the worlds of characters, say in Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* and Emecheta’s *The Joys of Motherhood* (Frye1957: 34).

But why *Things Fall Apart* and *The Joys of Motherhood* and not other texts? Both are acclaimed Nigerian literary works representing the Igbo world considerably with a most superb figural bent. The first was formerly read in the Department of Anthropology in prestigious American universities (Gates 1992: 3, 20), whereas the second presents to us the perspective of both *nso* and *pharmakos* from the viewpoint of the woman, especially in placing the woman on the cultural context wholly uninfluenced by Christianity in the first few pages of the text. Additionally, much to a cursory reader’s amazement, Emecheta, whose reputation supersedes Flora Nwapa’s, invested much labour in making *The Joys of Motherhood* reflect very interesting realistic phenomena through female characters that end up figuring the *pharmakos*. Such issues as sexuality, pain, barrenness, and the socio-anthropological construction of femininity, all discernible in the pages of this work do not come as surprises. Daily occurrences of the woman’s world in Africa, Emecheta being one of them, have informed these, although Derrickson is at pains to ascribe what women go through in this work to the clash of historical moments (2002). One would have been much too astonished if Achebe was to do this. Yet Achebe did not have to let surprises spring forth, for in *Things Fall Apart*, he also, contrasting Emecheta, furnished us with a heroic character that derives from the Igbo discourses of the precolonial days of his tribe when men ruled (Achebe 1958). Hence, in both works, gender-imprints are available especially in the creation of male and female protagonists that contrastingly capture the *pharmakos* image against the backdrop of a similar cultural milieu and cosmology familiar to both authors.

So in assimilating cosmology into its makeup, literature, the sort under study which posits in substantial measures the thinking of the Igbo, also enunciates the *nso* code in its structure, with the *pharmakos* image cascading overhead. The *pharmakos* (Greek for *scapegoat*) is an individual who finds himself in a paradoxical situation of sin and innocence resulting in his suffering in excess of his offence. As theorized by Girard (1982: 12-35), Frye (1957: 39-41), and Burkhardt (1979: 64-72), the powerful features this individual resonates are due to some palpable violence-inducing signs he bears. The signs could be physical: “sickness, madness, genetic deformities, accidental injuries” and general disabilities; cultural: belonging to an ethnic minority; religious: belonging to a sectarian or religious minority; social: being a “well known stranger” (15), or that of arbitrariness, in being a “totally random” victim (Frye 1957: 33, 34). In times of crises, the mob, the potentially murderous segment of society desirous to purify the community of the fouling element, casts aside good breeding, culture, and morality, latches onto these signs to unleash actions of aggression on him (Girard 1982: 14, 12). This context inaugurates the scenario out of which materialises the first *pharmakos*, one whose suffering vacillates between the tragic hero’s that induces fear and pity and that of the character of pathos, which stimulates only pity. It is fascinating to note that the above theory of the *pharmakos* has subsisted for long with no apparent efforts by scholars to investigate the possibility of the *pharmakos* suffering retributively, while still “living in a world where such injustices are inescapable part of existence” (Frye 1957: 41). As this work progresses, the nuances truly establishing the *pharmakos* as a paradoxical figure will be teased out first. This paradox, though conventionally clarified as being sin and innocence, also entails, as this work will later prove through the *nso* concept, suffering punitively. Subconcepts of the *pharmakos* theory as the mob, violence, also known as crisis, and signs borne would be called upon to aid analysis.

In accounting for the excess of this individual’s suffering as opposed to what his sin (or innocence) attracts, this article will undertake to first analyse the works under study using Girard’s theory of the *pharmakos*. The mob is what the white man and his coolies, a segment of the multilevel presence of the mob, are to Umuofia, Abame and Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart*. The others are Umuofia to Okonkwo and Umuofia, fronted by Okonkwo, to Ikemefuna. At the core of these three interrelated configurations of the text’s mob is Okonkwo, one possessing the capacity to appear in the foreground and sneak into the background as occasion demands. He rapidly oscillates between being a mob and a *pharmakos*, before finally fixing himself to the station of the *pharmakos* above. So in effect, Okonkwo is the most mobile and versatile of all characters. Nevertheless, I will begin with the mob features of the white man, for his presence alone alters the history of the indigenous people. In addition, the atmosphere of violence anticipating the emergence of Okonkwo as a *pharmakos* is also textually visible through his

prism. The irruption of large scale violence in Abame as an indissmissible example is concomitant with the white man's showing forth on the pre-colonial scene. The environment of violence is the reason why the last meeting was called in the market square; the reason why Okonkwo feels if Umuofia would not go to war, he would go alone; and the source of the colonial authority sending the court messengers to call off the meeting and why the messenger speaks brashly, "the white man whose power you know too well ..." (Achebe 1958: 146). Violence is the reason the white man is feared and why his word is law, and any act questioning it is counted as punishable irreverence. The white man is a foremost example and epitome of the mob though he is not alone, as an indigenous semblance of the mob also exists before he came, if Ikemefuna's father's murdering an Umuofia woman is of any significance.

Strangely, this mob does not see itself as the origin of the violence hanging in the air. Weak victims, individually or in groups, are always accused of engendering it and made to pay for it. Out of the many signs that the mob's victim (Umuofia) bears, physical marks stand out clearly. It is not the sign of sickness, madness, accidental injuries nor general disabilities that strike him most; it is "genetic deformities" (Girard 1982: 15). Now the description of deformity must not be taken in its literal sense. One would do well to see it figuratively, for this symbolic assessment emanating from the skewed perception of the African by the white man in *Things Fall Apart* orders his entire dealings with his host. In this text, after helping to untie the freshly dead corpse of Okonkwo, the District Commissioner, whom we later know as Allen in *Arrow of God* (Achebe 1954: 33), chews over the space he would assign Okonkwo in his future book titled: *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribe of the Lower Niger*, a title indicating that the Umuofians have joined the accumulating number of clans already vanquished. The African in the perception of the newcomer is disabled, with some "genetic deformities" (Girard 1982: 15). The white man sees him as deeply in need of help, and must be helped. It informs as much why when a group, Abame, stands in his way, the entire clan is wiped out, and when an individual, Okonkwo does same, he is driven to hang himself. Whether as an individual or a group, every obstacle must be severely surmounted and the African must be *civilized* against his will. In pursuing this imperative, the *pharmakos* figure is what he leaves in his wake, one that includes Okonkwo.

How then does Okonkwo, as an individual surfacing from the group *pharmakos* – Umuofia, get into this picture, he not being the only elder in Umuofia nor the only one in the market square, where deliberations are made by commonly "deformed" people? Okonkwo is configured into the victim of the mob by a mix of happenstance embodied in hard work and the group sign. Regarding coincidence, hard work has earned him a place amongst the elders of his clan and when Umuofians burn down the church of the local missionary for desecrating an *egwugwu*, a masked spirit, the

colonial administration arrests a group of six elders, Okonkwo being one of those chosen. Expecting to be treated with dignity, they are humiliated. From this point, Okonkwo can no longer bear the mortification, so much so that his envisioning a solo fight with the white man could be understood as being in order. Being an elder, he answers the call to assemble at the marketplace, the very last bit his hard work would earn him. From here, accident takes over, unveiling to us why it is he, of all the elders gathering at the market, that should be “sitting at the edge”, an occurrence affording him easy access to the head of the court messengers, who are also “a few paces from the edge of the crowd” (Achebe 1958: 146). When he is punished for taking full advantage of this chance position, he assumes a completely random victim’s status, a *pharmakos*. If Okonkwo’s punishment in *Things Fall Apart* is his suicide, this pressuring him to punish himself before others do it for him, then one must take the overall situation of the white man’s dealings with Umuofia, and indeed, with “Olu and Igbo” (metaphor for Igbo world [Achebe 1964: 84]) into context. We can peer at Okonkwo’s suffering on behalf of the Umuofians because he ventures to confront what others see and timidly choose the path of safety.

Does he really suffer unduly for his sin by the mob’s activities as to warrant the designation of the *pharmakos*? The first time we glimpse at a native mob, a part of society necessary for the configuration of the *pharmakos*, is in the scene where Okonkwo is being punished for Ogbuefi Ezeudu’s sixteen year-old boy’s death, a gross excess of a sin totally bereft of intentionality. For inadvertently killing this child, he commits a female *ochu* and would proceed on exile for seven years with all he has worked for destroyed by an Umuofian crowd-mob. Of course, the mob is not malicious in motive, in comparison to the conventional sort which visits chastisement on the *pharmakos*, both are equally destructive and have similar dehumanizing impact on the punished. In normal judicial circles, Okonkwo’s action in killing the sixteen year-old boy accidentally might have been overlooked and himself discharged and acquitted, assuming no negligence emanated from him. In *Things Fall Apart*, no one ever cares to look deeply on the possibility of negligence on the part of the boy. All attention is shifted to Okonkwo, one who had no prior intention whatsoever to kill the boy. In Umuofia, some penalty has to be paid for this and Okonkwo does. In paying, one asks, too, why should it be he, of all the elders of Umuofia who have gone there to honour the deceased that should kill the son of the honoured by his canon? The sign borne here is randomness as an arbitrary victim. Okonkwo’s *peripeteia* originates here, too. This is because his clan, a community of persons, “was like the lizard’s tail; if it lost its tail it soon grew another” and would not wait for seven years to elapse for him to return (Achebe 1958: 123). He does not successfully reclaim his place at his return until his suicide, a circumstance that leaves behind one long stretch of unjustifiable suffering.

Nonetheless, when Ikemefuna's subject is broached, Okonkwo transforms from a *pharmakos* into a mob, he being a member of the important socio-cultural echelon of his clan, the elder-mob and Ikemefuna the *pharmakos*. There is a track awkwardly leading to his becoming this. His personal achievement qualifies him to be chosen to lead the delegation of war to Mbaino to choose between war and immediate compensation for the murder of an Umuofia woman. Thereafter, Ikemefuna comes into the scene as a seeming equitable reward for a most rash murder. If the father had come himself to pay with his life, it would have been a sure case of equity. But with the boy being pushed forward to vicariously substitute for the father, a case of the innocent being dressed as a sinner, is a matter for thought. His sin? The narrator says of him:

As for the boy himself, he was terribly afraid. He could not understand what was happening to him or what he had done. How could he know that his father had taken a hand in killing a daughter of Umuofia? All he knew was that a few men had arrived at their house, conversing with his father in low tones, and at the end he had been taken out and handed over to a stranger. His mother wept bitterly, but he had been too surprised to weep. And so the stranger had brought him, and a girl, a long, long way from home, through lonely forest paths.

(p. 11)

The sign of the *pharmakos* in him shows forth as he chances to be the biological son to the Mbaino murder culprit, an arbitrary victim. So right from Mbaino, equity ends with the discovery of the killer and excessive punishment for no sin whatsoever takes on a life of its own right up to when Ikemefuna is killed in Umuofia. Just at the same time, his biological father becomes the first mob to his child before Umuofia and, by extension, Okonkwo, goes on with the same preoccupation. Still, Umuofia's stance is complicated, for in taking Ikemefuna, they hold that they are justly compensated for the loss of one of their own. Consequently, keeping him alive should have served the ultimate purpose of substituting for the depleted number, but this is not to be; well, who would specify for an owner what he does with his property, particularly considering the peculiar circumstance of Ikemefuna as an offscouring for the truly replaced, the young virgin that later becomes Ogbuefi Udo's wife, with whom he arrived Umuofia to serve the same purpose.

Examining intimately the application of the theory of the *pharmakos* on the character of Okonkwo as it pertains to explaining the relationship between his sin and guilt as stated far behind, one suddenly peeks at some basic universal pattern of the *pharmakos* theory pertinent to any work where a character is adjudged to be punished beyond the measure of his sin. In the above regard, the reading of Okonkwo's fortune is in order. Conversely, this reading leaves off a great chunk of what makes up Okonkwo's world, how

his being is framed, and the motivations for his action, good or bad. In filling up this *lacuna*, the *nso* concept comes handy in that it provides a local basis for the application of a universally conventional theory. In light of *nso*, Okonkwo can be said to have committed a crime, or have been punished commensurably at his suicide scene in the matter of killing Ikemefuna, Ezeudu's son, and now, the colonial messenger. If so, how do we re-interpret his near innocence at the *pharmakos* level to mean that he is guilty within the ambits of *nso*? How and when does he become guilty? The sum is that where *pharmakos* theory sees Okonkwo's circumstance as exceeding the limits of justice, *nso* directs that it is within the limits of equity. For instance, Okonkwo believes in his ancestors, spirits and divinities, and *nso* as sustaining the order of his own life and community. These rule his life and guide his actions, sometimes leading him to the point where he commits an offence, for which, on two occasions, he is liable for punishment and acquittal.

The *nso* code in supplying the ellipsis in epistemic significance of the concept of the *pharmakos* as theorized by Girard – through privileging the sub-concepts of the mob, violence, and identity marks – enable the figure of the *pharmakos* who suffers suitably to emerge. In reading *nso* into the *pharmakos* theory, Ikemefuna's death is strategic. His death will be brought into focus, before using insights generated to shed light on Okonkwo's suicide. Critics have accurately seen Okonkwo as having committed a crime by killing a child that calls him "father", leading to his fortune nose-dives (Carrol 1980: 42; Killam 1977: 20; Nnolim 1977: 58; Obiechina 1993: 131; Opata 1987: 71-79; Wren 1980: 44). Yet they stopped short of describing elaborately and illuminatingly the environment against which guilt could be best understood – that of Igbo cosmology in connection with the theory of the *pharmakos*. Of all the above studies, only Nwabueze's pointed out the place of this offence in relation to excessive punishment, a very remote hint at what the theory of the *pharmakos* enunciates. However, Opata's warrants dwelling on for three reasons – he claims that Okonkwo operates under uncontrollable circumstances; that the killing of Ikemefuna entails obeying the eternal sacred order; and the fact that his argument, when properly problematised or deflated, will eventually anchor Okonkwo's misery on deserved punishment for crime heretofore committed. This, in the long run, will assist in revitalising the extant *pharmakos* theory of excessive suffering by presenting an alternative but complementary mode of examining the *pharmakos*. Though Opata reasons that Okonkwo was not in control of the situation leading to his killing of Ikemefuna (76), which I agree to the extent of he not being the designated and intended killer, it must be noted that Okonkwo's "uncontrollable" circumstance is controllable enough for him to reason and rationalise the consequences of not killing him on his ego, and in the eyes and opinions of Umuofians. We must bear in mind that the ruling principle of his life, as well his elixir for success, has been "never to be

thought weak or a woman". Unfortunately, this tonic is invoked again to lead to his flouting *Ala's* code of *nso*, his downfall. Let us cast a glance at the murder scene's description by the narrator:

As the man who had cleared his throat drew up and raised his matchet, Okonkwo looked away. He heard the blow. The pot fell and broke in the sand. He heard Ikemefuna cry, "My father, they have killed me!" As he ran towards him. Dazed with fear, Okonkwo drew his matchet and cut him down. He was afraid of being thought weak.

(Achebe 1958: 43)

Members of the entourage may not have seen Okonkwo's fear. But beneath this façade lies his life's ruling deep structural code, and in less than a millisecond, a composite egoistic force overpowers his sense of morality, "paternal" bonding and the helpless child's quest for security from him. He may as well have murdered his son. In running to him and calling "father", Ikemefuna displaces in Okonkwo his biological father, which he does not reciprocate in the circumstance, the only occasion he fails to do so. Instead, he snaps off whatsoever filial attachment was there as he also displaces in Ikemefuna his murderer-father whose substitute he is. In the ensuing play of displacement, tugged by his ego, Okonkwo hews the boy down. His ego has once done this, when he nearly kills his wife during the Week of Peace and is punished, and would do it again in the matters of the white man's messenger and, ultimately, in his suicide. From his history, he seems not to have budged at all when it comes to killing, irrespective of the situation. Hear the narrator's corroboration: "His whole life was dominated by fear, the fear of failure and of weakness. It was deeper and more intimate than the fear of evil and capricious gods and of magic, the fear of the forest and the forces of nature, malevolent, red in tooth and claw. Okonkwo's fear was greater than these. It was not external but lay deep within himself. It was the fear of himself, lest he should be found to resemble his father" (Achebe 1958: 9).

Thus, we should look beyond the matter of being "inexorably led by uncanny fate" to explain Okonkwo's *raison d'être* in killing Ikemefuna, for it unlocks a flurry of emotional disturbances in him (Opata 1987: 76). Days after Ikemefuna's death, the likelihood of having erred projects as his remembering the work he, Ikemefuna, and Nwoye had done brings back the boy's memory to his mind. Still trying to brave it off by clutching at the code of manliness he has held all his life, he asks himself:

"When did you become a shivering old woman," Okonkwo asked himself, "you are known in all the nine villages for your valour in war. How can a man who has killed five men in battle fall to pieces because he has added a boy to their number. Okonkwo, you have become a woman indeed."

(p. 46)

Yet killing Ikemefuna unnerves him the way the other five deaths do not, and the motivation is not far-fetched: his active agency in his death, the boy he has “become very fond of” and one who beneath that steely mask he has come to see as a son “having looked after him so well” (20, 42), falls within the bounds of immorality. Above shows Okonkwo has a conscience, in spite of everything. We can also surmise that if Okonkwo has been less inflexible and egoistical, if he has been ready to give up the sense of being thought of as strong for once, Ikemefuna might – have died in the hands of a less familiar elder and not his.

Though Opata asserts that in killing Ikemefuna, Okonkwo is obeying an eternal order, which is well acknowledged, he seems to have fallen short of granting that there is not just one eternal order or sacredness. With *Ala*, which once punished Okonkwo for killing a young boy at the background, and the order by the Oracles of the Hills and of the Caves in the foreground, one would be right to state that there are hierarchies of eternal orders and degrees of sacredness. A sacred order could be a subset of a subset of an overarching divinity and eternity. While some have bounds, others are boundless in their authority. Very important evidence in Opata’s observation is the recognition that morality has a place in the killing of Ikemefuna – that is, the fact that the death scene can be viewed by the lens of good or bad; his only grouse, I reason, remains that the act is “unconscionable” (Opata 1987: 76). *Ala* agrees that in killing Ikemefuna, Umuofia is killing the person who killed Ogbuefi Ezeudu’s wife, and this is justice, but must he, who is already bonding splendidly with Okonkwo, his household and the community of Umuofia, be killed by one who is already becoming his father, an Umuofia man – Okonkwo? It is on the ground of this gradual assumption of indigene-ship and sonship of the soil, a *diala*, and “fathership” despite he not being biologically an Umuofian, that *Ala* possibly finds an occasion to strike, demanding justice from Okonkwo for killing a neighbour. This sense of potential kinsmanship could probably have informed why the designated killer of the boy could not carry it out effectively, substantially leaving it for some other Umuofian elder to do. Albeit, Okonkwo chances to fill the vacuum by doing it, and doing it effectively. If Ogbuefi Ezeudu is a well respected elder in the clan, the oldest, then he must have been speaking the mind of the elders in asking Okonkwo not to have anything to do with the death of the child. So to describe Okonkwo’s *nso* in killing a neighbour as an “unconscionable act,” namely, “an unreasonable act, an act beyond the bound of rightness; an act unusually harsh and shocking to the conscience; dishonest; dishonourable; outrageous; indefensible” and many other like terms (*The Free Dictionary*), still does not steer his action from falling within the threshold of immorality, *Ala*’s expansive domain of juridical authority. In other words, Okonkwo is the guilty one, an intentional killer of his neighbour, a male *ochu*.

With Okonkwo's crime clearly delineated, the evidences of *nso* bared and proven before *Ala*, payback is consequently imminent and only punishing the culprit will ward it off and purge the land. Okonkwo's sin must be avenged; the process takes the course of the *pharmakos*. While *Ala* is waiting to do justice, he kills the young son of Ogbuefi Ezeudu mistakenly, committing a female *ochu*. Whether female *ochu*, or the male sort, *Ala* views murdering Ikemefuna and the court messenger as offences, both requiring just recompense because they are killings outside war situations. But in the wisdom of Umuofia, he is only liable for punishment for the former offence, the female *ochu*. When Okonkwo returns from serving this penalty, *Ala*'s patience is already out of steam and it does not take long before she exacts her long-awaited punishment. Where human agency was needed for exacting the earlier atonement, the goddess must have chosen to act solely in the latter case, which is also customary, seeing there is a distorted assessment of Ikemefuna's murder on the part of the elders of Umuofia in not requiring atonement in a case involving a child deemed vicariously guilty of sin as Ikemefuna. In Ikemefuna's case, all sorts of legitimacies, excluding the moral sort, appear to be in support of his death – spiritual, communal, and the redemp-tive principle that swops him for the one who was supposed to die, that occasioned his coming to Umuofia in the first instance. No moral legitimacy warrants a man killing a young boy he has come to love. In the above tension of legitimacies, *nso* can be perceived at some depth bellowing Okonkwo's name as blameworthy. So in Ikemefuna's innocence is the contending space of the sin of murder. And no instance is so serendipitous as the occasion of the killing of the head court messenger. So in committing suicide, Okonkwo punishes himself for two murders, two crimes. His son is right after all, in reference to his suicide that those "who live by the sword must die by the sword" (Achebe 1960: 125). Although Nwoye seems to be speaking from the discourse of justice other than the indigenous sort, his concept of justice appears to be no different from that of *Ala*'s *nso*. So the theory of the *pharmakos* should have taken into consideration this code of order that is first broken by the *pharmakos* before the table begins to turn for the worse for him.

Interestingly, the retributive code of *nso*, the mob, crisis, and *pharmakos* are all at work in helping to figure out the criminal. If the mob of the clan is in the foreground on behalf of *Ala* to mete punishment to Okonkwo in that first case of manslaughter, the white man and the protégés are also in the background acting as *Ala*'s surrogates in quickly leading him to his death. In a way, Okonkwo has no apparent signs attracting these calamities. He is just an arbitrary sufferer, and this suffering begins with his availability, over which he has no choice, being an Umuofian elder at the scene where Ikemefuna's life is taken. Thereafter, his sin quickly takes off from here for which he is punished. When Okonkwo kills the head of the court messengers on behalf of Umuofia, since dealing with the white man's menace is the

reason for gathering at the market square, he is first rejected by Umuofia in the murmur – “why did he do it” before dying for Umuofia (Achebe 1958: 147). When the District Commissioner, full of vengeful wrath, asks for Okonkwo and he is shown the dangling corpse, his pent up wrathful passion quickly dissipates. A major reason could be that whether directly or indirectly, Okonkwo’s death is what matters and in his death is the suspension of the Abame formula he comes with. Once more, a primitive tribe has been crushed in the crushing of Okonkwo, the last man still standing and resisting. This insight derives from the future book he intends writing, which was not in the picture before Okonkwo’s suicide scene. It must be noted as well that in Okonkwo’s death can be located the consummation of the justice of *Ala*, whose definitive heralds the white man and the *kotma* are in their crucial quest to restore order. They hereby present the intricate form the *pharmakos* could take when supplemented by indigenous African thought.

Nnu Ego, around whom *nso* revolves, is the central character in Emecheta’s *The Joys of Motherhood* as is Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart*. Her anguish has a history: Nwokocha Agbadi’s senior wife dies and she is to be buried, and in accordance with the culture of the place, “her slave and her cooking things” must go with her (22). But the “young and beautiful woman did not wish to die yet” (23). She “was pushed into the shallow grave, but she struggled out, fighting and pleading, appealing to her owner Agbadi” (23). Thereafter,

... Agbadi’s eldest son cried in anger: “So my mother does not even deserve a decent burial? Now we are not to send her slave down with her, just because the girl is beautiful?” So saying, he gave the woman a sharp blow with the head of the cutlass he was carrying. “Go down like a good slave!” he shouted.

“Stop that at once!” Agbadi roared, limping up to his son. “What do you call this, bravery? You make my stomach turn.”

The slave woman turned her eyes, now glazed with approaching death, towards him. “Thank you for this kindness, Nwokocha the son of Agbadi. I shall come back to your household, but as a legitimate daughter. I shall come back”

Another relative gave her a final blow to the head, and at last she fell into the grave silenced for ever. As her blood spurted, splashing the men standing round, there was a piercing scream from the group of mourning women standing a little way off. But it was not their feelings for the dead woman that caused this reaction. Agbadi saw: they were holding Ona up.

(p. 23)

It is not mere coincidence that as the poor slave is dying Ona is also falling ill, the first sign of pregnancy. The slave has promised to come back to Agbadi’s household as a legitimate child, and it seems likely that this promise is being fulfilled. A foremost index of her return is the “lump on her

head, which in due course was covered with thick, curly, black hair” when Nnu Ego is born nine months after the slave’s death, beside the accompanying headaches. The seer whom her father consults to unravel the mystery behind her existence, declares that she is “the slave woman who died with your senior wife Agunwa. She promised to come back as a daughter. Now here she is. That is why this child has the fair skin of the water people, and the painful lump on her head is from the beating your men gave her before she fell into the grave” (27). He leaves them with a counsel that Agbadi should “go and appease the slave woman” (27). Appeasement means Nnu Ego must “worship her *chi*”, the slave woman, as her personal god (27). Also part of the pacification is that the slave woman must be properly buried in her separate grave and an image carved for Nnu Ego to take around. It would be sometime before this appeasement would be effective. Years later, Nnu Ego still suffer childlessness and the attendant consequences of biting humiliation and violent crisis in her matrimonial homes from her two husbands, circumstances teleguided by the mob, the slave woman. With her suffering, she assumes a *pharmakos*’ status.

Some snag sets in here as one tries to read the representation of suffering through the *pharmakos* theory, perhaps, given the manner gender has aided in positing her as a *pharmakos*. First, the mob has a multilevel identity comparable to the sort obtainable in *Things Fall Apart*. Nwokocha Agbadi represents the mob that raided the community of the dead slave, visiting the entire clan with violence and destruction. He, a one-man mob is responsible for the slave’s death, through handing over the slave to his most senior wife for possession and bearing children through this wife. One of the children abhors an improper burial for his mother by striking the slave a hurting blow. Although Agbadi reproves his son for this, the point where he replicates disparately his mobship in people related to him by blood and also sets in motion the process of the abdication of his individual mobship, his remonstrations, is not weighty enough to deter another relative from issuing forth another blow that effectively silences the slave forever. When the slave returns as promised, it is Agbadi who eventually gives her a proper burial by giving her a separate grave. This is the arena where he totally relinquishes his mobship and the slave girl’s *chi* takes over, picking on Nnu Ego and making her childless and her marriages disruptive.

The *pharmakos* sign the slave girl bears, which gives her out to be mobbed and taken captive, is arbitrariness – just being a member of the raided community. As she comes back in form of Nnu Ego, the sign also borne is arbitrariness, just being conceived the day after Agbadi’s senior wife dies – an unwilful biological act undertaken for one by one’s parents. But having returned as Nnu Ego, the identity of the rabble goes through what could be dubbed the metaphysical displacement of matter and body. The slave girl displaces herself in Nnu Ego, but does not replace and replicate herself in her. It is such that whereby displacement is total in terms of history, Nnu

Ego's becoming the slave girl, replacement is either partial or wholly unenacted on account of Nnu Ego not being the slave girl come back in flesh and blood. Whether impracticable or not, the nonenactment of this replacement in bodily form creates the vacuum that empowers the absent entity, now a mob unseen, but truly existent, to overpower the present personage to ruin. Yet in this culture, it is undoubtable that Nnu Ego is the slave girl and the slave girl Nnu Ego. Under the above reality, the slave girl, Nnu Ego's *chi*, undertakes the same position, though with some degrees lower in essence, as *Ala*, while serving as an unseen but truly existent mob. This strikes one as some very peculiar features of the mob discoverable in African literature, since both the slave girl and Nnu Ego have suffered hugely in excess of their sins. In fact, they have no greater sin than just being randomly present in the places where they are found, made to be, or identified by the very first mob, Agbadi.

How well can the *pharmakos* analysis also serve as an invitation for a rehabilitation through the *nso* concept, particularly, as all the characters embody the Igbo world where *Ala* rules? The narrator tells us: "the slave woman who was her *chi* would not give her a child because she had been dedicated to a river goddess before Agbadi took her away in slavery" (31). It is indisputable that Nnu Ego is a *pharmakos*, suffering for committing no sin by any means and in the stead of the father who allows the slave girl to be buried alive in spite of the contrary wise whisper of his good angel. The figure of the *pharmakos* elaborated above is the conventional scale, where one undergoes suffering in surplus of one's sins with the certainty of proving valid the general applicability of the *pharmakos* theory to literatures irrespective of traditions. On the other hand, the guilt segment of the paradoxical identity of the *pharmakos* figure, connoting his being justly served, all this while mostly hinted at but never so well demonstrated, is also within sight. Through the *nso* concept, the process of the *pharmakos* emergence as one suffering commensurably would be examined. Agbadi, through such kin as children and wives, and by means of neighbours, co-warriors in various expeditions, has sinned and must be adequately recompensed through Nnu Ego.

In Nwokocha Agbadi and those associated with him, we discern two mobs – the first at the capture of the slave and, second, in making the slave pay the price of dying with the mistress with all pleas for life falling on deaf ears. By killing her, they ignore to concede that the slave girl has over time had her relationship in the household approximate to that of near kin much in the manner of Ikemefuna's in *Things Fall Apart*. Maybe Ikemefuna's history seems some shades lighter than hers because his father was the culprit in the murder of an Umuofia woman, whereas the slave's bears no record of sin whatsoever, save the very chance incident of war and raiders storming her village. Having progressively donned the relationship of kinship, it would be inhuman to make her die against her will, involuntarily. Assuming this

degree of kinship is nonexistent, the weighty fact of her desperate pleas for mercy in a nonwar situation, should have saved her life, for it is so disheartening to all around that even her captor in remonstrating his son for heartlessness and impetuosity, adjures him: ““Stop that at once! ... What do you call this, bravery? You make my stomach turn.”” (23). But this is all he can do, for when “[a]nother relative gave her a final blow to the head, and at last she fell into the grave silenced for ever” (23), he does not muster enough audacity to counter this brazen brutality. And it is in holding his peace, a captor before his dying captive-mistress, that *Ala* is prompted to step into the matter to require a just recompense from him through proxy, his most loved daughter, whose barrenness would cause him uncircumventable psychological pain and ignominy. Who can defy *Ala*?

Now a full blown woman in her marriage, Nnu Ego unable to bear children, goes from one *dibia*, medicine man to the other. They are consistent in telling her that the slave woman is responsible. In her suffering is the punishment for her father’s two crimes – for disallowing her to continue her miserable existence despite a heart-rending imploration. We understand from the *dibia*’s responses that the river goddess is remotely responsible for her barrenness, which is theoretically but not practically related to *Ala*, though both are goddesses. The river goddess has her own domain of authority, the sea and the realm of such humans who have affinity and covenant with her. Nonetheless, while the river goddess’ sphere is restrictive, much like the Oracles of the Hills and of the Caves’ in *Things Fall Apart*, *Ala*’s is not. Hers is unlimited, the goddess of the Earth, encompassing the mountains, hills, streams, rivers, and seas. Gods could act with the possibility of tension and contradiction in dispensing out orders, but never in terms of meting out double punishments where one flouts orders sanctioned by two or more gods. In the latter instance, just one punishment to the offender from whichever god chastises first could serve the purpose of atonement. Thus, the punishment meted out by the river goddess could very well meet *Ala*’s will, even though it does not originally emanate from her.

Moreover, if Agbadi has not raided the slave’s clan, none of these would have been happening to him. For his crimes, Agbadi’s punishment is psychological, showing evidently on several occasions of unkind loathing from Nnu Ego’s husbands. Nnu Ego would weep and sorrow before her father, asking him to do something. Agbadi would respond in agony: “Don’t worry, daughter, if you find life unbearable, you can always come here to live. You are so thin and juiceless. Don’t you eat enough?” (33). Nnu Ego describes Agbadi’s psychological torment thus: “The poor man suffers more than I do. It is difficult for him to accept the fact that anything that comes from him can be imperfect. I will not return to his house as a failure, either, unless my husband orders me to leave. I will stay with Amatokwu and hope one day to have a child of my own” (33). Regrettably, she does not stay for long, for on

one occasion, after her husband beat her, Agbadi finally takes his daughter home, renewing pricey sacrifices to Nnu Ego's *chi*,

begging the slave woman to forgive him for taking her away from her original home. He told her through the rising smoke of the slaughtered animals that he had stopped dealing in slaves and had offered freedom to the ones in his household. He even joined a group of leaders who encouraged slaves to return to their places of origin, if they could remember from where they came. All those in his compound who refused to go were adopted as children; he had seen to it that proper adoption procedure was carried out, in that they were dipped in the local stream and had the chalk of acceptance sprinkled on them. It would be illegal for anyone in the future to refer to them as slaves; they were now Agbadi's children. He made all these concessions for the emotional health of his beloved daughter, Nnu Ego.

(p. 35)

Agbadi makes accelerated attempts at expiation, but it still does not subtract from the fact that he is a sinner. Whether *Ala* will be appeased could better be left to time alone to decide. Interesting in Agbadi's case however is the spectacular manner in which a mob in African literature can really dismob himself, in pulling off the slough of mobbishness in comparison to Okonkwo in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, who despite the outwardly inaudible mutter of his inner self and later his confidant, Obierika's polite but grave stabbing reproof on why he has a hand in the death of a "son", refuses to budge seeing it as "his latest show of manliness" (Achebe 1958: 47). So when he dies, to this end, he is deemed to have been equitably requited by *Ala*, as Obierika's remarks also bear record (46-47), but in light of the *pharmakos* theory, he is adjudged to have suffered unjustifiably. Herein lies indeed the paradox commonly ascribed to the *pharmakos*.

From the foregoing, the extant *pharmakos* theory illustrating the excessive punishment for sins or no sin at all resorted to in interpreting African literature is discovered to have left a gaping room for extension, revitalization, but not substitution. Holding to light such theoretical subconcepts as the mob, violence, and detection marks of the *pharmakos* and weighed against the context of sin and justice and augmented by such indigenous phenomenon as *nso*, *Ala*'s code of order in Igbo cosmology, the conventional *pharmakos* theory has come to be greatly illuminated. Here, the paradoxical quality of guilt commonly ascribed to the *pharmakos* is bared and made visible, giving us classic case of how Western critical thoughts can be localised for the purpose of reading African texts.

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