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Obi Okonkwo, Odili Samalu And Chief Nanga: A Sociological Critic Of Value Orientation In No Longer At Ease And A Man Of The People

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Abstract

Society and individuals have certain values at all given times, which are adjudged positive or negative depending on their effects on society or individuals. This paper draws insights from Chinua Achebe's No Longer at Ease and A Man of the People to study the socio-cultural value orientation that exists in society at a time and its implications to the people so oriented. Through a sociological approach which considers man and his relationship with other men and with his environment, and through a qualitative textual analytical methodology hinged on Gaius' Affective-Cognitive Theory of value, the study examines the influence of individual's value orientation on self and on society as well as the society's value orientation on the individual with specific reference on the major characters in the texts selected. The result of the study reveals that the values of the protagonists were not only influenced by pressure from society but also by personal needs and idiosyncrasies, which eventually led to their ruin, bringing us to the conclusion that the society as well as well as the individual are contributory to their socio-cultural value orientations. It is therefore, suggested that the society and individuals should be considered in all matters capable of improving their value orientations positively at all given times for the betterment of human society.

Keywords Values, Individuals, Society, Needs, Improvement, Orientations, Humanity.

Introduction

Chinụa Achebe's novels have been in the centre of criticism since their publication as works of literary art, more than can ever be said of any other literary texts from the shore of Africa. This

has less to do with Achebe's prominence as a writer than with the "surplus value" (Derrida, 2007) of his novels, a feature which has continued to invite researchers to different critical engagement with the texts. To speak metaphorically, in the evening of their life, his novels are "still very generous, inexhaustible subject[s]" ("The Retrait" 51); inexhaustible with respect to what is as yet to be done on the novels, their very capacity to engender still further researches, in spite of their old age; but inexhaustible, more so, as regards the corpus which the novels have received as they traverse their infancy and youth to attain adult life. A cursory survey on any of Achebe's novels will show countless number of research already carried out on them. As for No Longer at Ease and A Man of the People, one cannot substantiate the claim that they have been poorly engaged by critics. However, there have been dimensions to the criticism the two novels have received, the upshot of which necessitates the present research.

For instance, No Longer at Ease is seen to depict "from an African perspective the internal struggle of the indigenous culture and identity to survive under the imposing and usurping weight of colonial modernization and education" (Abukar and Huang 1-2). As for A Man of the People, Carroll (1990) has argued that the novel delineates the conflict of values between the characters of Odili and Chief Nanga who represent opposing political ideologies. Carroll (1990) like Dwivedi (2008) contends that "their relationship defines the basic problems of political morality" (119). In a similar vein, Coussy (2005:48) agrees that the dual voices within the text expose the conflict of values, what he calls Odili's "double dealing," and this is what makes him "a superb object of satire." So there is no doubt that the text embodies a clash of values, either in regard to the two major actors, or to one of them. But what remains to be ascertained is how the values espoused by the characters conflict with the prevailing societal values and how their downfall is as a result of these conflicting values. A similar problem crops up in No Longer at Ease, where we encounter Obi Okonkwo, a character who is torn between two conflicting values, traditional and western. What therefore repays investigation is how these divergent value orientations, that is, the dynamic opposition of individual and societal values can be seen as constitutive of the downfall of the major characters in both texts.

By value here is understood what the civilized and rational mind cherishes, esteems, treasures, prizes preciously and has an inclined attitude for. It is the principle or standard of a person or society for the good or the benefit of the person or the society concerned. According to Kurt Bauer, "Having values is. . . like having conviction about, or like valuing [] something: it is what might be called an essentially appraisal-dependent attitude. That I believe or value something consists in my having a certain attitude or behavioural disposition" (qtd in Gaus (1990: 205-206). Hospers (1956) outlines three senses in which the concept of value is used, namely i. to describe a "liking or preference"; ii. To refer to that which promotes a goal independently of one's liking or preferences"; and iii.To designate "that which has value or worth in itself without any reference to any end" (583-584). In line with this, Asogwa (2008) follows Gaus (1990) to characterize value as intrinsic and extrinsic/instrumental; while the one refers to that which is an end in itself, and said to embrace such virtue as charity, honesty, happiness, truth etc, the other is a thing of value, though regarded as a means to an end (Logic, Philosophy & Human Existence 173). The value

systems of societies differ, just like the value system of individuals within a society can differ, or an individual value system can be said to differ from the prevailing value system of his society. This is what we identify as value orientation. But the value orientations here may include not just the conflict of values between the individuals and their society, but also the conflict of values within a character and between characters. It is argued that the downfall of the major characters in the two texts has to do with the dynamic interplay of the conflicting value systems as upheld by the individuals and their society.

In Gaus's Affective-Cognitive Theory of value, the following are itemized as the characteristics of value:

1. Valuing, judgments of valuableness, and values provide reasons for action and choice. They guide choices and enter into deliberation by providing at least a partial ordering of persons, acts, rules, institutions, experiences, objects, etc.
2. Not only do we often agree to differ about values, value judgments, and valuing, but in some cases we also believe that people can disagree or differ on question of value and yet each can quite properly and correctly maintain that neither is in any way mistaken.
3. Valuing and value judgments are in some way grounded in the properties or characteristics of the thing valued or judged to be valuable.
4. Every person experiences situations in which his values, valuings or value judgments conflict.
5. Value is both positive and negative, that is it concerns both goodness and evil. (2-3)

Gaus (1990:8) further explains that valuing certainly provides reasons for choice and action, but "to simply equate valuing with choice or rational action misses and obscures a good deal, making it impossible to even sensibly ask why one might have reason to do one's moral duty when one does not particularly value the dutiful action or its consequences." It is therefore the public morality that makes the claim "to provide all members of the public with reasons to act morally, and so abstract from specific descriptions in order to articulate the general code that underlies all social life" (Gaus, 1990:16).

The focus of this paper is not on society as such, but on its values and their orientations, which, as shall be seen in the analysis, are both societal and individual. A critique of the divergent values in the societies of No Longer at Ease and A Man of the People will bring to light their dynamic interplay in the lives of the major actors of both texts and how their eventual downfall is consequent upon this interplay.

The Disordered Players

Society, to paraphrase Akan proverb, is like a cluster of trees which, when seen from afar, appears huddled together, but which would be seen to stand individually when closely approached (qtd. in Gibson 179). As a cluster of trees, society is a living organism whose existence depends, not merely on this cluster, but on the functionality of its individual parts. This perhaps is what John Locke meant when he referred to society as a "vital union of members" (qtd in Ricoeur 2004: 107);

for individuals in society are not simply 'being-with-one-another [in the sense of having] the same world there with Others'; fundamentally, it is "being with one another in the manner of being-for-one-another" (Heidegger: 1949). In its wide application, the dominant sense of society which has persisted is the idea of the network of significant relationships among a localised group of people. Such network, in order to be sustained, develops typical forms of behaviour, or social norms which embody the interests, values and practices shared within the network, with the sanctions to safeguard them.

This is the nature of society we encounter in No Longer at Ease and A Man of the People. In the former, we learn that Umuọfia is an organic society, which forbids and authorise certain social practices. In other words, some actions are valued, while others are devalued, and every member of the society seems to be in accord with what is the normative standard of living. As part of a larger society, Umuọfia understands itself only by a sort of contrastive analysis; that is, in terms what constitutes it, the kind of actions with which Umuọfians are recognised, as these are features by which it can be told apart from, say, the city of Lagos and other villages. These are parts of the communal ligature, and may have been evolved from what Habermas (1998) calls the "we-consciousness". Of this, Habermas writes that it is "founded on an imagined blood relation or on cultural identity, of people who share a belief in a common origin, identify one another as 'members' of the same community, and thereby set themselves apart from [others]" (130). This therefore explains why the people of Umuọfia refer to Obi with such words that connote consanguine relationship as "our son", "a brother", "the only palm fruit" (6). In fact, according to the President of Umuọfia Progressive Union, "a kinsman in trouble had to be saved, not blamed; anger against a brother was felt in the flesh, not in the bone" (NLE 6). But besides being connected by what Tyler identifies as "a community of origin" (26), Umuọfians are held together by "conscience collective" (Durkheim, 1964: 88), the "unspoken habits of thoughts" (Foucault, 1970: 324), which inform their response to action of social proportion. To be part of this society is to share in this collective ego, since is it by this that the blood tie that holds every member together is held fast.

No doubt Obi is a member of Umuọfia society, and can be said to connect with other members of the village through a blood origin. But he cannot be seen as a bona fide member of his society, the reason being that this character is a "disordered player", whose value system flies in the face of the value orientation of his society. In Foucault's terms:

> He is the disordered player of the Same and the Other. He takes things for what they are not, and people one for another; he cuts his friends and recognizes complete strangers; he thinks he is unmasking when, in fact, he is putting on a mask. He inverts all values and all proportions, because he is constantly under the impression that he is deciphering signs. . . [H]e is Different only in so far as he is unaware of Difference. (54)

In his relationship with other characters in the text, Obi can be seen to "invert all values and proportion", especially in what he says and does. For example, education is a thing of value to Umuọfia society, being a society caught up in the throes of modernity. But a specific kind of education is considered more valuable than another, for which Obi is sent to study Law abroad.

According to the narrator, “They wanted him to read law so that when he returned he would handle all their land cases against their neighbours” (NLE 7). But Obi goes to study English instead of Law; that is to say, Obi values English more than Law, and by so doing he undercuts his societal value. The outcome is that he is “left alone”, not in the sense of parting ways with him, but at least letting him be; for as their only educated son abroad, Obi himself is an object value to Umuọfians, quite indispensable, irrespective of whatever course he has gone overseas to study. But Obi does not see himself as such; in other words, he devalues himself to the extent that he appears on the day of his welcome ceremony in “shirtsleeves because of the heat” (NLE 31), against all their expectation that he will be well turned out for the occasion. Obi does not recognize the significant of his social outfit, whereas Umuọfians attach importance to this, so that the status of a man can be said to reflect in his attire. Perhaps this is why other members of the union are all dressed in “agbada or European suit”, with a certain air of importance.

If value is related to choice, as understood in Gaus (1990) then what a character does or chooses not to do points to his value orientation. This is to say that every moment of choice calls up one's value system. In this case, attention is drawn to the crucial moment of decision in Obi's life. Such moment is seen when he has to choose between his mother's life and the marriage to Clara, between going home for his mother's burial and sending money for it, between collecting and rejecting bribes. In his insistence to marry an osu, against the advice of friends and Umuọfia Progressive Union, one can say that some things of value to his society cease to matter anymore to him. And this is usually attributed to his dual cultural exposure, as a result of which he now discriminates between some of his societal practices. But that is not to say that Obi enjoys a stability of value, as he oscillates between two value systems. When backpedals in his decision to marry Clara, it can be said that he values his mother’s life more, which aligns him with his societal values. However, he does not uphold this system of value, at least not in the sense that Joseph does. As Joseph notes, “‘Do you know what an osu is? But how can you know?’ In that short question he said in effect that Obi's mission-house upbringing and European education had made him a stranger in his country –the most painful thing one could say to Obi” (NLE 72). In Foucault's words, Obi “cuts his friends and recognizes complete strangers”. Is this not what is seen when he walks out on the members of Umuọfia Progressive Union for interfering in his private affairs, and chooses not to identify with them again? But to say that Obi is a stranger is also to touch on his difference. Obi is “Different only in so far as he is unaware of Difference”, a fact which explains why he collapses the boundary between slaves and the freeborn in his attempt to marry Clara.

By straddling two worlds, with their opposed systems of values, Obi is caught up in an in-between state, neither of which offers him a full sense of belonging, hence his oscillation. His downfall therefore consists in this oscillation, in the dynamic interplay of western and traditional values in him, or better still, in the opposition between what may now be called his personal values and the values of his society. Seen this way, Obi thereby entraps himself in his own words, for according to him, “Our fathers also have a saying about the danger of living apart. They say it is the curse of the snake. If all snakes lived together in one place, who would approach them?” (NLE 81). It is the curse of the snake to live apart; it is equally the curse of Obi, not out of choice but of

necessity – fact comprehended in the proverb of Obi as "the only palm-fruit". Seen as such, Obi's fate begins to approximate Orimil's in Akwanya's Orimili, who is said to have been "cast out – out into that Between, between gods and men" (Heidegger, Existence and Being 312) because of which he lacks a proper sense of belonging in his society. In Obi's case, it is, one would say, between the Umuofians and the white men; as a result of this conspiracy of fates, "he ha[s] been placed in the centre of a great tug-of-war" like Orimili (Akwanya, 1991:158). For when he is in Lagos, Obi is closer to the values of the white man than to those of his people. But in his hometown Umuọfia, Obi seems to share more in the values of his people, for his earnest wish is that the white man should "come and listen to the talk of men who made a great art of conversation, [] men and women who knew how to live" (NLE 50). However, this is a comment by one who is more of a spectator than a participant, one who leaves passing comments on what is going on around him without an actual involvement. Thus Obi can be said to mediate Heidegger's "median space", which sets him apart from others, lodging him as it were at the outer rim of human existence.

Frye reminds us that Aristotle's hamartia or flaw "is not necessarily wrongdoing, much less moral weakness: it may be simply a matter of being a strong character in an exposed position" (38). While Obi may not be considered a strong character, he is apparently in an exposed position, which doubles his downfall, for he lacks a stable value to execute the communal role entrusted to him. In the words of Joseph, "Remember you are the one and only Umuọfia son to be educated overseas. We do not want to be like the unfortunate child who grows his first tooth and grows a decayed one" (NLE 75). But this unfortunate child Umuọfia has become through Obi, and his tooth is no doubt a decayed one if Obi's motivation is to transform the values of the society in which he is born. In Obi, therefore, we are looking at a character whose values differ from those of the other members of his society. Though he is with them in terms of having the same Umuọfia with them, he is alienated from them in terms of having a different view from the members of his society on their social and existential issues. In an argument with Christopher, Obi sets about theorising about bribery; it involves for him the use of "improper influence" (121), a view he obviously shares with Christopher; however, for Obi, however this is done, whether in monetary terms or taking of sexual advantage, it does not attenuate bribery as granting of unmerited favour to an undeserving party. Thus we have two characters who are both products of dual cultural experience, but Christopher is able to uphold the values of his people, his view on bribery being only espousal of the dominant view. For although bribery is something bad, it is almost unanimously accepted as normal by everyone in Umuọfia society. Obi being eventually smacked of in a bribery scandal after his holier-than-thou attitude towards it can be seen as way of being reabsorbed into the value system of his society. But because he is an intersection point of the dynamic opposition of two different values, Obi thereby meets his downfall in his complete alignment with one of these value systems. Society is therefore where, to paraphrase Foucault, the sovereignty of the same, so difficult to express, eclipses the distinction existing between beings (55).

A society in which bribery already seems to have been accepted as a norm, not as dirt to be flushed out, is the kind of society we encounter in A Man of the People. The value system of society in A Man of the People is under serious tension, as the text opens up a society which has

been dislodged from its moorings as a result of bad leadership. This is a society "in which you saw a fellow cursed in the morning for stealing a blind man's stick and later in the evening saw him again mounting the altar of the new shrine in the presence of all the people to whisper into the ear of the chief celebrant" (A MoP 100). Things have been turned upside down, so that what can be taken as the positive values of society of the text, when seen outside the immediate context, appear aberrant. However, it is in this society that we encounter the two major actors, namely OdiliAnd Chief Nanga, both upholding a different system of values.

Chief Nanga is a man of the people par excellence, not just in being the political representative of his people, but in being the embodiment of the ideals of his age. He symbolises the reign of the slogan "you chop, me self I chop, palaver finish" (A MoP 100) and the common belief that no "sensible man would spit out the juicy morsel that good fortune placed in his mouth" (A MoP 2). In Chief Nanga therefore we find a nexus between the values of the village and what may be called the national values. But in Odili is witnessed the disruption between the two value systems. For in the latter's case, the governing ideal is encapsulated in the proverb that "the hawk should perch and the eagle perch, whichever says to the other don't, may its own wing break" (A MoP83). Hence his motive force is to bring people to the awareness that Chief Nanga has taken much for the owner to ignore. We shall come back to this later.

To say that in Chief Nanga is seen an integration of the two value systems is to draw attention to the survival mentality that runs all through the text. Every character is out to ensure their survival, to carve out a niche for themselves through which they can have a continued access to the source of survival. The villagers are of the view that when it is one's turn to eat, they should be allowed to reach the plate. Food, in whatever form it manifests, whether in terms of money or national cake, is in this case a thing of value, and this is recognised by everyone in the text. However, the conflict of values is in consequence of eating into another's portion. This is what orients Odili and Nanga to the poles of opposite values; but whereas Nanga is seen to be one with his society, which shares with him the view that it is his turn to eat and so should be left to enjoy his fortune, Odili is against his society for sharing a different view. This way, the dynamic interplay of individual and societal values is played out more in Odili's life than in Nanga.

The sequence opens with Odili's caustic remarks about the leaders of the country, leaders who in his view have "started the country off down the slopes of inflation" (2). And the people are not only ignorant but cynical about the corrupt practices of their leaders. In other words, it is to say that the people share with the leaders the value of eating when it is one's turn, so that they can patiently wait for when fortune locates them. In their common idiom:

> "Let them eat," was the people's opinion, "after all when white men used to do all the eating did we commit suicide?" Of course not. And where is the all-powerful white man today? He came, he ate and he went. But we are still around. The important thing then is to stay alive; if you do you will outlive your present annoyance. The great thing, as the old people have told us, is reminiscence; and only those who survive can have it. Besides, if you survive, who knows? it may be your turn to eat tomorrow. Your son may bring home your share. (96)

What is seen here is in Odili is therefore an individual who goes beyond the smooth surface of things to unveil the unevenness within. He appears to be more informed than all other characters, for he knows that all is not well, that a thief has been plundering what belongs to the masses, leaving them in perpetual suffering. Odili maintains a detached position from the government of his country, and from this position he lashes out his attack. In some way, what Nwahunanya (2010) said about the archetypal Outsider in West African fiction begins to crystallise around the character of Odili, especially if by an Outsider is understood "a character whose sensibilities tower above those of the average members of his society. A man ahead of his times, he is involved in a selfless and corrective crusade for social redirection" (231). But Odili does not eventually pass for an Outsider; he is according to Nwahunanya (2010) "hypocritical, operates double standards and does most of what he does because of self-gratification" (231).

However, in our reading, his double standard is consequent upon the dynamic oscillation between his personal values and the prevailing values of his society. He is caught in-between what seems to have been endorsed by his society as a common practice and what he considers as the ideal form of life. In Gaus's phrasing, "though all value judgments are impersonal in one sense, they also, perhaps in more important ways, are tied to particular valuational perspectives" (11). But one may hazard that Odili is only criticising the government because he is not involved in leadership himself, or if you will, that he has as yet nothing for his benefit from the government of the country; so that his values undergo some transformation the moment the plate is drawn close to him. This value transformation is a result of his very first encounter with Nanga; for when he is recognised by Nanga in his visit to Anata Grammar School, with the intimacy that follows, Odili begins to adjust his view. We hear him say: "I knew I ought to be angry with myself but I wasn't. I found myself wondering whether –perhaps –I had been applying to politics stringent 33 standards that didn't belong to it" (A MoP 7).

Thus Odili's values attain an overhaul the moment he finds himself in Chief Nanga's house. Being close to this individual who is a representative of values of both the village and nation at large, Odili begins to adjust his value system. One would imagine what Odili who has been cynical during Nanga's visit has morphed into. As he confesses himself, "sitting at Chief Nanga's feet I received enlightenment; many things began to crystallize out of the mist –some emergent forms were not nearly as ugly as I had suspected but many seemed much worse. However, I was not making these judgements at the time, or not strongly anyhow" (A MoP 27). Of interest to us here is Odili, who before now wishes to distance himself as much as possible from politics and its leaders because of the values he upholds, and how he has begun to swim seamlessly with its current, to the effect that his initial biting remark apply as much to the indifferent masses as to him.

Our attention is drawn to the visit he makes to Elsie in the minister's Cadillac, with the ostentatious air all about him. Seen at the hospital, one will mistake him for the minister himself, and he enjoys every bit of the privilege accorded to him. As it is, he could not have succeeded in seeing Elsie but for the ministerial look he assumes, for we learn that "although it was against all the laws of the hospital they had let me into the female nurses' quarters and woken up Elsie to see

me" (A MoP 38). And the gateman had "levered the iron barrier' with a salute as he granted entrance, while the 'elderly male nurse I beckoned to had sprinted forward with an agility that you would think had left him at least a decade ago" (38). All this is because of the ministerial flag carried by the vehicle he goes in, and reflecting the glory of a minister, he is prepared to absorb all of it. Odili perceives the smell of power, and is lured in by its fragrance, to the extent that when Elsie remarks the grandeur of the minister's Cadillac, and wonders if the leaders do not already have their heaven on earth, his response is:

> "My sister I no know-o. Any way make we follow them chop small for did world." I opened the door myself and went in, and she helped me close it. "I'll be here on Thursday then –at four. Run along now and sleep, darling." I sat back with a proprietary air unusual for me. She stood waving until we disappeared round the bend. (39)

This way Odili entraps himself in his own language, for we recall that it is the same Odili who had said: "Tell them that this man had used his position to enrich himself and they would ask you –as my father did –if you thought that a sensible man would spit out the juicy morsel that good fortune placed in his mouth" (2). The juicy morsel has found its way into Odili's plate, and from every indication he is not ready to discard it; otherwise his crusade against the corrupt leaders would have been genuine.

He is quite unruffled in his stay at Chief Nanga's house; as a matter of fact, he welcomes the minister's arrangement to send him abroad to further his studies. Both of them have gone to see Hon. Simon Koko, the Minister for Overseas Training, in this regard, so that if everything has worked out without any interruption, the sequence will not have bounced back to resume the course it inaugurates in the very beginning. For Odili is gradually plunging into self-loss, that is, if we take it that it is the true Odili we encounter in the beginning of the story. But he is merging into one and the same person with Nanga, seeing that he does not only like the little privileges he receives with the minister, but also participates in the drama that keeps unfolding around Nanga's character. Besides, in their conquest story, Odili gives the impression that he shares similar value of women with Nanga, in terms of not placing much premium on them, a case of which is seen in the way he passes Elsie off as "a good-time girl", despite that he truly longs for her. Part of the argument here is that value is portrayed in one does or chooses not to do. So one can see the correspondence between Odili's and Nanga's values (societal) in the way he sleeps with Jean, John's wife, and Nanga's similar action with Elsie, the one he now claims to be his, as a result of which he feels betrayed by Nanga.

With the betrayal the narrative returns to the course which opens the sequence. Odili sees more cause now to oppose Nanga, and maybe by so doing reclaims his value ideal. It is not just that Nanga is a thief; it is that he has taken too much for Odili to ignore, for by sleeping with Elsie, Nanga has "treated me as no man had a right to treat another –not even if he was master and the other slave; and my manhood required that I make him pay for his insult in full measure" (AMoP 51). One can therefore say that Odili is prompted, not so much by the attempt to restore the values of his people which have begun erode, but by the very threat to what he holds dear. Just as Odili oscillates in his values, so does the value system of his society become all the more unstable. For

we can see the general outcry of the villagers over the outrage committed by Josiah; with the public condemnation of his action, his shop is closed down within one month. Thus the villagers can rise en masse to say "enough is enough" to such a flagrant violation of societal values, but they are silent over such violation at the national level. Thus the villagers have a common will with which they can say "no" to what threatens their value system. For a devious practice of the kind of Josiah's tugs at the very thing that the people hold in common and also at their the collective mind through which they identify with one another as a people of the same village. As the narrator observes, only in the case of the villagers do the "words had meaning. The owner was the village, and the village had a mind; it could say no to sacrilege. But in the affairs of the nation there was no owner, the laws of the village became powerless" (A MoP 100).

However, such blind buyers they are in the affairs of the nation, for they lack the insight to see the Machiavellian tactics used by the leaders of the country to exploit them. In fact, the nation is too large to differentiate between the thieves and the non-thieves. This explains why the likes of Nanga get away with anything they do; this equally explains why Josiah, who has received the designation of a thief by the villagers, can be seamlessly integrated in Chief Nanga's campaign, with those who frown upon his mischievous deed now mingling with him. The implication is that the country makes for an effacement of differences; that at the level of nation everyone is the same. In this way, one can distinguish between two co-existing values in A Man of the People, the national values and those of the village, and along the same track, the societal and individual values, with the one seen as the macrocosm of the other. As pointed out earlier, Nanga shows a continuity between these two systems of values, but in Odili we see a disruption. However, the argument here is about the tussle between the individual and societal values, and how the downfall of the characters results from it.

Odili's failure as a politician is therefore related to his projection of his personal values onto the societal level. The personal clash between him and Chief Nanga becomes the motivation for his political activity, or at least what spurs him on to vie for the ministerial seat. Accordingly, he declares, "I no longer cared for anything except the revenge" (A MoP 51). Consequent upon this, the narrative proliferates into two complementary sequences both of which are equal in emphasis: securing Nanga's political seat and winning his betrothed culminate in one and the same struggle along the plane of revenge. One can, therefore, in consideration of Odili's ulterior motive, say that he has not the interests of the people at heart; what matters to him is that he too gains access to power, and by so doing avenges his humiliation. In this we see him fail because his mission is anything but altruistic. But by pursuing his interest, he aligns himself with the prevailing value of his society, which is to secure a position through which one can reach the plate. In Chief Nanga's case, the failure can be seen to follow from the triumph of a value different from what he upholds.

Conclusion

The concept of value presupposes choice. This is to say that one's value system is at issue when a choice, in the sense of preference, is made. Our argument here is premised on the dynamic

interplay of individual and societal values and how this occasions the downfall of the major characters in Achebe's No Longer at Ease and A Man of the People. Most of the choices the characters face through which their values are brought to light are all ethical choices, the correctness or error of which depends upon the society's system of values, upon what society thinks is most appropriate in certain situation. Society here has got a mind, and its mind is the mind of the collective ego, the mainspring of argument and justification which gives an action its ethical significance. It does not matter if the character considers his choice right; right and wrong are both relative terms, and they are measured against the people's "conscience collective", not against that of the individual. Heidegger (1949) teaches that in every community, what is collectively held determines what is individually held: the self of everydayness is theyself and the thing that constitutes it is the way it has been publicly interpreted:

> In so far as Dasein is an entity that I am, and is simultaneously determined as being-with-one-another, it is not I myself who for the most part and on average am my Dasein, but the Others; I am with the Others, and the Others are likewise with the Others. No one is himself in everydayness. What someone is, and how he is, is nobody: no one and yet everyone with one another. Everyone is not himself. This Nobody by whom we ourselves are lived in everydayness is the "One." One says, one listens, one is in favour of something, one is concerned with something. (The Concept of Time 8E-9E)

In this case, we are one with Gaus (1990) when he asserts that "although the value-based reasons to act implied by our value system are essentially agent-relative, these systems presuppose the rationality of impersonal moral principles" (14). It does not matter if what is collectively held is right or wrong; what matters, and this is very important, is that it is collectively held. So, whether society's preference is in consonance with individual's own preference is of little interest here, for societal wellbeing is prioritised over that of the individual's. In this way, there appears to be an ethical scale upon which the action of members of the society is calibrated, and a particular action is adjudged normal or abnormal based on where it falls on the scale. This scale comprehends both the dominant collective consciousness, and what in Foucault is understood as "what lies hidden in a people's mind" (Gaus, 1990:324). The mind of a people: to be one of these people is to have the same mind as they, to share in this collective mind; in other words, it is to think in accordance with the dictates of the people's collective mind, while divesting oneself of the individualising impulses. In a matter of what is to be valued, it is the mind of the people that prevails; what the individual values is subordinate to what his society thinks is the ideal. However, the sustained opposition between the values of the individual characters and those of their society is seen to constitute their downfall, as evident in our reading of both texts.

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