An Examination of Amadioha's Archetype Role(s) in the Igbo Traditional Justice System in Isidore Diala's The Pyre

Maduabuchi Davids Nwachukwu

Abstract

Amadioha, the Igbo thunder and lightning deity, has his archetypes as the God of justice and law enforcement in the Igbo cosmos. These identified archetypes bring kinship harmony, which can be understood as the relationship expected in kinship structure within a locality bound culturally and recognises itself as one. Among the Igbo and many other tribes in Africa, kinship structure is both horizontal (human to human) and vertical (human to non-human). Kinship therefore starts with humans, which includes the nuclear and extended families, clans, villages, and towns, to tribal and intertribal relationships, to non-humans, which include the ancestors and other deities as may be defined by a cultural group. Each member of the kinship group is expected to fulfill their roles and obligations for peace and harmony. When the expected roles and responsibilities in a kinship structure are marred, deities like Amadioha can act and play a significant role in balancing and restoring normalcy within the structure. The paper interrogates, through the lens of structural functionalism, the Igbo kinship structure and how the horizontal acts of characters in Diala's *The Pyre* lead to disharmony and break the communal kinship synergy, thereby bringing catastrophe within the kinship structure, and the vertical acts of Amadioha in the restoration of peace, enforcement, and adjudication of justice.

Keywords: Igbo traditional Justice System, Amadioha, kinship, justice and adjudication

Introduction

Justice is paramount among the Igbo of Nigeria. This "strong sense of justice is littered in many [...] Igbo cultural ethos and pathos" (Oraegbunam, 2019, p. 53). Obiwuru (2020) has pointed out that "[t]here was (and there is) a profuse regard for justice in Igboland" (p. 29). According to Obiwuru, the Igbo cosmos comprises a synergy between the gods and humanity. He further argues that any act of injustice angers the gods and creates a disharmony that ruptures the structure, which deities like Amadioha, the thunder, lightning, and justice god, determine. Nwachukwu et al. (2019) contend that Amadioha, the Igbo god of thunder, lightning, and justice, has been an entity in

Maduabuchi Davids Nwachukwu, PhD, Clifford University Owerrinta, (Ihie Campus), Abia State, Nigeria, maduabuchidavidsnwachukwu@gmail.com.

Igbo cosmogony since time immemorial. His impact is felt in the Igbo worldview as he retributively metes out justice to anyone who violates communal ethics or subverts the people's free will. Consequently, Amadioha is the guardian of the people's collective will and functions as the sacred embodiment of the community's moral conscience: an archetypal force that internalises truth, checks abuse of power, restores violated equilibrium, and affirms that no priest, politician, nor ordinary citizen stands above the ethical order of the community (Nwachukwu, 2026, pp. 157, 159-160). Diala (2005) identifies Amadioha's fundamental nature and asserts its known characteristics as the god of thunder, lightning, and justice. Scholars like Arinze (1970) and Iwe (1986) argue that Amadioha singles out culprits, kills them, and seizes their property (Arinze, 1970, p. 16; Iwe, 1986, p. 14). The offering of sacrifice is made to Amadioha to cleanse the land whenever he strikes the unjust, who are never given an appropriate burial but are shoved to the evil forest to rot.

Maduka (1988) points out that "Amadioha symbolizes strength or power which manifests through thunder and lightning. Anyone who violates the sanctions of the land dreads Amadioha" (pp. 242–243). This conception comes into play because thunder and lightning in the Igbo cosmos indicate the wrath of God. Oparaocha (2004) elaborates and substantiates that natural symbols like "lightning – *amuma igwe* – are regarded as a sign of impending evil from Amadioha" and "thunder – *egbe igwe* – are the messengers of Amadioha, normally sent to destroy evil people or houses in which evil things are hidden or trees under which evil things are buried" (p. 42). He argues further that thunder strikes at the exact place where the evil thing is and removes it, either exposing it or striking it away. Emeka Ekeke (2012) corroborates Oparaocha's conception when he points out that natural occurrences like thunder and lightning "symbolise the wrath of God" (p. 8), "through such symbols, divinities like Amadioha and Ṣàngó" are conceived among the Igbo and the Yorùbá of Nigeria.

These observations by Ogbechie and Maduka are reflected in *The Gods Are Hungry*, a novel written by Okeke Chika Jerry, where Ekejiuba, one of the main characters, refuses to serve Ezumezu, the Umukabia community deity, an office that falls within the jurisdiction of his family. He refuses to serve the community deity not because he is a Christian but because he views the god as moribund and archaic. However, Amadioha, seeing him as a dissenter, kills him and drags his corpse to his shrine, the very place where he had refused to serve. Ekejiuba's corpse is described as "blackened almost beyond recognition like a man electrocuted by the potent charges attributed to Amadioha, the god of thunder" (Okeke, 2010, p. 41). Even his brother, Amandi, who refuses to heed the advice of Anyagafu, the Umukabia diviner, to abandon the corpse of Ekejiuba in the shrine, is also struck by Amadioha as his corpse is "as black as Ekejiuba's own" (Okeke, 2010, p. 57). Uyammadu's "corpse discolouration" (Okeke, 2010, p. 132) after he refuses to take up the priesthood of Ezumezu is a corroboration of Amadioha's hand in his death. The death of these three disobedient siblings at the hands of Amadioha, the god of thunder and lightning, is not merely because Amadioha considers their stand a personal affront to him. Instead, Amadioha, as the law enforcer of the community, considers their recalcitrance detrimental to the well-being of their society; hence, their deaths are meant to serve as a deterrent to those who would want to follow in their footsteps in the Umukabia community. Amadioha, in this perspective, plays a vertical functional role in the restoration of peace and harmony in a dissonated kinship structure that is horizontally desecrated by humans. Structural functionalism is adopted a theory in this paper to engage complex systems of the society whose parts work together to promote stability and social order.

Structural Functionalism: Theoretical Framework

Structural functionalism examines social life through the interdependence of institutions, culturally defined roles, and the practices by which a community organises its affairs. Structural functionalism stems from the early works of theorists like Émile Durkheim and Herbert Spencer but gained prominence in the mid-20th century through the contributions of Talcott Parsons and Robert K. Merton. The theory posits that society is a complex system whose parts work together to promote stability and social order. Gleaning from the work of Susser (1992), Fisher (2010) argues that the theory of structural functionalism "traces its beginnings back to the ancient Greeks and the writings of Aristotle" (p. 71). Fisher (2010) argues that Aristotle's investigations into the "ultimate causes" and ideas geared towards achieving certain ends or utilities serve as a foundation for structural functionalism. Fisher (2010) also argues that Baron de Montesquieu's argument about the separation of powers, and even Charles Darwin's theory of evolution, are rooted in functionalism. Montesquieu's argument, Fisher (2010) contends, promotes stability and social order, while Darwin's theory of evolution conceives the idea of survival in functional terms. Each function is important to the system, but anyone who refuses to adapt ceases to exist.

In the anthropological tradition discussed by Finnegan (2012, p. 40), particularly in relation to A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, its principal concern is the integration and maintenance of social arrangements. Aça and Yolcu (2017, p. 50) similarly distinguish this institutional orientation from Malinowski's greater emphasis on individual needs. Their approach is useful not because it assumes that every tradition produces harmony, but because it asks how kinship, authority, religion, ritual and other collective arrangements are represented as allocating responsibilities and regulating relations. The analytical distinction is between an institution's recognised purpose and what occurs when its members act, or fail to act, within it.

Oral and written narratives provide a particularly revealing site for this inquiry. Finnegan (2012, p. 321) argues that functionalist readings have treated oral traditions as means of socialisation, moral instruction and the legitimation of political authority; certain myths, for instance, have been interpreted as charters for existing institutions. Yet she also cautions against assigning these functions without adequate evidence from performance, audience and context, since a narrative may entertain, ridicule, question or imaginatively reconstruct social experience (pp. 321–324, 365–366). This warning is decisive: the presence of a story, proverb or ritual in a text does not prove that it successfully disciplines a community. Its represented purposes must be read alongside narrative voice, setting, participants and responses.

African scholars in their various works broaden and clarify both the promise and the limits of Structural functionalism. Babajo and Muhammad (2024, pp. 119–121), in the study of Nupe orature, associate legendary, communal and supreme myths with accounts of political origins, collective identity, spiritual authority and rites surrounding marriage and death. Their classification demonstrates how narratives can explain the positions occupied by people and institutions; it is not a universal taxonomy of African myth. Similarly, Dederen's (2012, pp. 74–75) discussion of Scheub's reading of Xhosa folktales relates narrative conflict and resolution to the restoration of social relationships. Dederen, however, resists the idealized picture of traditional society as an invariably harmonious, self-regulating whole. His treatment of women's storytelling shows that narratives may uphold values such as responsibility and respect while criticising the misuse of authority (pp. 85–87). Consequently, literary conflict may expose contradictions within the very institutions said to sustain communal order.

This qualification is sharpened by Aça and Yolcu's (2017, pp. 51–52) discussion of Merton's functional distinctions. A function concerns consequences that contribute to a system's adaptation or integration; a dysfunction concerns consequences that obstruct these processes. The same institution may benefit one group while disadvantaging another. A separate distinction is drawn between manifest functions, the acknowledged or anticipated purposes of an arrangement, and latent functions, additional, unintended consequences. 'Latent' does not mean 'harmful', and institutional survival does not establish that its effects are beneficial to everyone. Accordingly, an analysis of customary obligations should ask: whose interests are served, what outcomes are represented, and whether sanctions repair injustice or merely restore outward order. Aça and Yolcu also observe that the reduction of tension may defer rather than remedy structural problems (pp. 53–55); their discussion of maladaptation further allows for practices that become less responsive to changing circumstances (pp. 56–58).

The concept of function must also be located at the appropriate analytical scale. A rite may be portrayed as affirming the authority of elders, yet its consequences for younger participants may differ; a proverb may express communal consensus while being deployed strategically by a particular speaker. Aça and Yolcu's (2017, pp. 51–52) insistence that an arrangement may serve some groups and disadvantage others makes this a question of evidence, not moral presumption. The relationship between structure and function must therefore be situated historically. Liu and Zhang (2022, pp. 3–4) argue, within their neo-classical reformulation, that cultural heritage may acquire new functions as the socioeconomic settings of its transmission and performance change. Their examples concern chiefly Chinese artistic heritage and cultural tourism. Their distinctions among original, related, and element forms describe degrees of continuity and artistic reconfiguration in particular heritage settings (pp. 10–11). The emphasis on change also discourages an overly neat division between tradition and modernity. A practice may persist symbolically while acquiring new patrons, audiences, or sanctions; it may likewise be contested without disappearing. Liu and Zhang's study describes transformations in particular heritage settings rather than a universal sequence of cultural replacement (2022, pp. 10–11).

An Igbo illustration makes the institutional question concrete. Okafor (2020, pp. 168–169, 172–173) discusses *nwa ọha*, the understanding of a child as a responsibility shared beyond the biological parents by relatives and the wider community. In her reading of Ubesie's *Mmiri ọkụ e ji egbu Mbe*, Enyi's mistreatment exposes a discrepancy between this communal ideal and the care his guardians actually provide (pp. 174–177). The example interrogates precisely the existence of a recognised duty which oftentimes does not guarantee its fulfilment. Okafor also draws attention to the neglect of male guardianship and the disproportionate attribution of child-rearing failures to women. Enyi's later misdemeanour accounts, in the broader perspective the gap between prescribed institutional responsibility, unequal accountability, and represented consequences.

Literary mediation remains central. James and Wakkai (2025, pp. 19–23), examining Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, discuss the incorporation of Igbo expressions, proverbs, culturally marked vocabulary and other linguistic resources into English prose. Such devices make relationships of kinship, ancestry, spirituality and communal authority intelligible within a literary world; they do not, on their own, establish the empirical functioning of those institutions. A structural-functionalist reading, they argue, must therefore distinguish social structure from textual structure. Proverbs, imagery, dialogue, characterisation and narrative perspective are evidence of how

cultural expectations are articulated, negotiated or resisted in the work, not automatic proof that all members of a historical community accepted them.

These restrictions matter when relating literary interpretation to living communities. Dederen's attention to women's interpretations of storytelling (2012, pp. 85–87) and Finnegan's emphasis on performance and audience (2012, pp. 321–324) caution against making a single narrative voice stand for an undifferentiated people. Differences of generation, gender, social rank or religious commitment should be examined where the text represents them, not inserted as predetermined explanations. Equally, fictional criticism of an abusive custodian of tradition need not amount to rejection of every institution that custodian represents.

This study consequently employs a critically qualified structural-functionalist approach. Its analysis identifies the institutions and relationships depicted in Diala's *The Pyre*; establishes the duties and values attributed to the characters; examines the conduct, conflicts and sanctions through which those expectations are fulfilled, disputed or neglected; and assesses whom the resulting arrangements protect, disadvantage or exclude. Susser (1992) contends that structural functionalism perceives society as an organic whole instead of a mechanical whole. As an organic whole, there is no "looseness of association"; rather, each individual or component functions and depends on the others for their whole maintenance. In the Igbo traditional society, deities like Amadioha are part of the kinship structure. They, the deities, work with humanity to maintain law and order organically.

Justice and Amadioha's Archetypes in Isidore Diala's The Pyre

The Pyre is a drama that explores the sacredness of Amadioha, how human acts desecrate Amadioha's holiness, and the consequences that follow such acts. Amadioha in *The Pyre* is mythically described as the "miracle of light", "Spirit of truth, dread white of the gods, a god that cleanses guilt" (Diala, 1995, p. 7). "Invincible messenger of truth, Inviolable spokesman of the gods, Divine god whose nature abhors evil" (Diala, 1995, p. 8). These appellations establish Amadioha in the Igbo cosmos as a god of justice who enforces justice without fear or favour in the land. To establish the central affinity of Amadioha from the ancestral world, a masquerade, which is known as *Mmanwu* (in Igbo), which literally means the spirit of the dead, appears from the ground and invokes the power of Amadioha. The masquerade's coming from the ground establishes a link between the dead, who are the ancestors, and the living, as he, the masquerade, serves as the primary interlocutor at that moment between the two spatial worlds. This ancestral masquerade reveals Amadioha in his symbolic mythical nature as a "fabulous ram whose whiteness dazzled the eyes./It has countless horns of lightning./ I sang its praises and sacrificed the white cock." (Diala, 1995, p. 2). Diala (2005) argues that this symbolic revelation and association of Amadioha with a ram has a two-fold interpretation. That Amadioha is "imagined as a white ram, Amadioha's proper and preferred offering is also a ram" (p. 104). However, the masquerade's observation that he has sacrificed the white cock shows that Amadioha, as well, takes a cock, a white one, as a sacrifice. Nneoma, the wife of Amakwere, who is struck dead by Amadioha, also brings a white cockerel to Amadioha for a cleansing rite.

Amadioha's dreaded nature is revealed when Nneoma sings a dirge and likens the death of her husband to the shooting of an "eagle perched on the iroko" (Diala, 1995, p. 13). The dirge shocks and infuriates Ndudiri, the priest of Amadioha, who screams:

> Tufiakwa! Ala! Forbid! Not even Agwu would move anyone to call Amadioha's victim praise names. His fiery presence compels even the mad to lucidity. How dare you? Indeed, an eagle perched in the dust of death! (Diala, 1995, p. 14).

Ndudiri's scream comes because it is taboo to sing praises to the victims of Amadioha, no matter the relationship between the person and Amadioha's victim. This is because death in the hands of Amadioha is accursed and ill-fated. The "fiery presence" and nature of Amadioha compel even the mad to refrain from such acts. Since Nneoma is not mad, Ndudiri then queries what really dares her to sing such a praise song for her dead husband. He quickly turns the praise song into a vilifying one as Amakwere becomes "an eagle perched in the dust of death!" This reaction and change in the praise song of Nneoma is to avert the possible vengeance of Amadioha on the people, as Amadioha archetypally guards the norms and the laws of the land. Nneoma, recognising herself, defiantly implores: "Redeem my ignorance, dread priest of the fiery god. I know you've caught fitful glimpses of eternity. In the wake of your god's fiery manifestations" (Diala, 1995, p. 14). Nneoma's search for redemption stems from the fact that she knows the dreaded consequence of such a eulogy to the victims of Amadioha, but being the bereaved, she has spoken before thinking of whatever consequence that follows. Despite this defiant apology, she contends with Ndudiri that:

> Deification is a human act.
> The gods are our own creation.
> We give birth to them, not they to us….
> Thus to paint a state of evil
> Sufficient to compel a god to anger
> And drag him down to earth (Diala, 1995, p. 15).

Nneoma's contentions suggest that even though Amadioha is responsible for the death of his husband, she cannot rule out the evil machinations of humans in Amakwere's death. She contends that the gods are of human making; therefore, they, the gods, can also be manipulated by humans so as to achieve a particular wish. She argues that when 'a state of evil is painted', it lures the gods down to the earth to cleanse such perceived atrocity. The argument that humans create gods is also seen in Achebe's *The Arrow of God,* where the people gather to create Ulu, whom they jettison when Ezeulu fails to eat the remaining yam and announce the beginning of the harvest. Ndudiri, who fails to understand the position of Nneoma, later categorises her as a mad woman, but she contends:

> Call me mad.
> But the sterility called total submission to the gods Does not appeal to me.
> This is the gods' greatest temptation.
> Their invitation to evil,
> Who by their very nature are as rule good.
> Such erosion of divine nature is the death of the gods (Diala 1995, p.16).

The nature of the gods from Nneoma's perspective is good. However, the gods can be tempted to do evil, and if they do and act according to this temptation, their essence as divine and "good" in nature is questionable. Nneoma asserts that Amadioha is tempted to kill her husband, Amakwere. She questions the just and fair nature of Amadioha in striking her husband dead. Her questioning of the justice and fairness of Amadioha and the quest to unravel the cause of her husband's death, however, is one of

the main dysfunctional acts that cause tragedy in *The Pyre.* However, the 1st Member of Amadioha's cult maintains:

> Women rule the kingdom of words. But a man whose house is ablaze does not pursue rats. Our rites must be completed, the land cleansed, the stench of death exorcised from our land. This infernal noose that hangs above us must be loosened and cut to bits (Diala 1995, p.16).

This position of the 1st Member of Amadioha's cult indicates that cleansing of the land is superior to the cause of Amakwere's death. The statement comes because the cult members themselves know that if the land is not cleansed, an "infernal noose" is still hanging above the community, which they too are also part of, for Amadioha will spare nobody when vengeance is to be unleashed. The 2nd Member of the Amadioha cult counters Nneoma directly:

> A woman first perfects the chameleon's strides of pride then she complains that the world is laughing at her. Child, Amadioha never kills the innocent. His victims are people under the burden of *nlu* and who would not divulge themselves of it. When invoked against an innocent man, Amadioha merely thunders at the innocent man's compound. At most he strikes a minor plant: a god's visitation ought to be marked. But if the man who sent him on vain errand does not make haste to placate him, that man becomes the victim. That is the god we serve. You've surely heard people say they would rather Amadioha was invoked against them than an evil deity (Diala 1995, p.17).

The 2nd Member's position debunks Nneoma's claims that Amadioha is invoked to kill her "innocent" husband by his perceived enemies, probably the members of Amadioha's cult. He justifies that Amadioha only kills those who have done one *nlu*-sacrilege, or the other, and fail to 'divulge' or desist from it. Even if Amadioha is invoked to kill the innocent, as Nneoma's argument suggests, Amadioha will only 'strike a minor plant' to mark his visitation, but goes back to the person who invokes him, whom he will kill unless the person placates him. People, he argues, would be happy to have Amadioha invoked against them rather than any other deity. This argument of the 2nd Member is to authenticate the archetypal nature of Amadioha in the Igbo cosmos as a god of justice whose impartiality no other god rivals.

Amadioha's claims of his victims' properties, as Arinze (1970) and Iwe (1989) observe, are recognised by Nneoma as she asserts:

> Carry offerings of thanksgiving to the shrine of your god, now that all that wealth is Amadioha's, now that it is taboo for me to touch anything that was his-except the children that he has not. I pray, that rid of the burden of wealth, I may also be spared public envy. Adversity then may still yield us some consolation (Diala 1995, p.17).

Amakwere's properties are what Nneoma describes as an 'offering of thanksgiving' to the shrine, as all the properties of Amakwere will be transferred to the shrine, for it is a 'taboo' for her to touch anything that was his.' The claims of Amakwere's property by Amadioha make Nneoma a little bit happy, as it will lessen the public envy that would have followed if she alone sat on such a huge wealth. She considers the situation a kind of consolation in adversity. The Members of the Amadioha cult reveal that Amadioha "forewarned" (Diala, 1995, p. 20) Amakwere's incessant quest for wealth, which they argue is responsible for his death. However, Nneoma declares:

> If he soiled his hands in blood, may Mother Earth reject my body! But then it is really those who dread manly sweat but rather haunt the shrine of deities, depending on the patronage of suppliants, that cannot deny blood (Diala 1995, p.21).

Nneoma's assertion, which debunks the suggestion of the Members of the Amadioha cult, advocates that it is they who want 'the patronage of suppliants' who must have been responsible for Amakwere's death. She even implores 'Mother Earth' to reject her corpse if Amakwere ever soiled his hands in his pursuit of wealth. This position of hers makes her defile the traditional lore, as Ndudiri argues that since the corpse of Amadioha's victim is "Rejected by the gods, he must also be rejected by men" (Diala, 1995, p. 22), and kisses the corpse, which should be untouchable by any because the death of one in Amadioha's hand is a sacrilege. The victims of Amadioha are not given a proper burial. They are shoved to the evil forest with bamboo sticks where their (Amadioha's victim) corpse are left to rot. It is because of this that Ndudiri implores the earth to reject the charred body of Amakwere. The Members of the Amadioha cult flee because the act of Nneoma has not been heard of in the history of the town. Everybody in the shrine scampers for safety because of Nneoma's impious act. Ndudiri, who finds it difficult to understand Nneoma's untenable action, states: "Amadioha, flaming god, roast me/ In the searing ember of your wrath, /And sacred mother, Earth, may your enchanted bosom/Reject too the dark dark charred remains" (Diala 1995, p.26). Ndudiri's statement confirms a choice of death rather than to behold evil, which the act of Nneoma depicts. He, however, acquits Nneoma's idiocy as he states: "Your littleness, young lady, before Amadioha/Makes you guiltless. /Only the priest of Amadioha/Can be responsible for this ransom desecration" (Diala 1995, p.32). Ndudiri hands over his *Ofo*, the symbol of his authority, to Okere and Ekere, his acolytes, and makes himself a "sufficient ransom for" Nneoma's desecration of the land. He will have run too, but he is 'mortally chained/To the spot of this desecration' because he is the presiding priest who has the power and responsibility of cleansing the land and, therefore, responsible for whatever comes out from the cleansing. Since Nneoma has further desecrated the land by kissing the corpse of Amakwere, who is rejected by the gods and men, he has no option but to offer himself a martyr so as to be a cleansing sacrifice for the restoration of peace, stability, and sanctity to the desecrated town.

This act of Ndudiri makes Ekere underscore that Ndudiri's 'deification is imminent' as 'Altars' have 'already' risen 'in his name.' (Diala, 1995, p. 34). Akunna underscores the reasons for Ndudiri's deification:

> The god whom you served so devotedly
> And whose part you took at his desecration
> Endowed you with divine strength
> To pay you with a place among the immortals.
> We now number you among their sacred league;
> They consecrate your deification (Diala 1995, p.37).

Ndudiri's devoted nature to stand in for his god and the act of immersing himself with Amadioha, the god that abhors evil, earns him a place in the celestial abode as he is deified as an immortal.

The town ostracises Nneoma because of her actions; even the embrace from Ekere to console her causes a brawl between him and Okere as Ekere shouts: "Recreant! Must you damn your soul/ By embracing one abhorrent/ To gods and men alike?" (Diala 1995, p. 42-43). Ekere does not only stop there but kicks his hands with a spade

that they are using to make sure that the tomb of Ndudiri never disappears. Ekere cannot even touch the accursed lady who has brought so much evil than good in their town. Nneoma, to the astonishment of the two acolytes of Ndudiri, starts to eulogise Amadioha:

> I chant salutation to you, awesome god, In your lethal form of fire and death.
> Darkened in your holy wrath,
> Your victim lies as a terrific tribute
> To your unearthly whiteness, Cosmic Ram.
> You show the terror of evil
> By forcing the darkness of the heart outward.
> In the primal night of infernal evil
> May your celestial light, spirit of truth
> Ever blaze the continuity of goodness-
> Even if man, the eternal vermin, dies (Diala 1995, p. 48).

Nneoma's panegyric to Amadioha comes as a surprise to Okere and Ekere. The surprise is because they wonder how a person who has caused so much calamity in the town can just change and start to praise the same god they think she despised a moment ago (Nneoma never despises Amadioha but thinks that her husband's death has a lot to do with the evil machinations of those who know the secrets of Amadioha despite kissing the corpse of her unfortunate husband, which is an abomination). Nneoma's panegyric recognises the awesomeness of Amadioha, its archetypal nature as the lethal fire that kills one who offends the lore of the land. She even identifies Amadioha's symbolic nature of being the "Cosmic Ram" and elevates him for beaming the 'celestial light' and being the 'spirit of truth.' However, she still asserts her position by insinuating that Amadioha will continue in his goodness, "Even if man, the eternal vermin, dies." Her description of man being eternal vermin indicates that the man who is generic here is extremely and undesirably bad. The conclusion accentuates her earlier position on what may have been the cause of the death of her husband. However, she elevates and upholds through her panegyrics the sanctimonious and pious nature of Amadioha.

Okere, one of the acolytes of Ndudiri, surprised by Nneoma's eulogy of Amadioha, admits:

> Time forever teases out marvels beyond Human reckoning from the bosom of eternity! Who would have thought that you would ever
> Wake from your delusion to pay homage to the god?
> If only you didn't martyr Amadioha's priest first! (Diala 1995, p. 48).

Okere's confession stems from his former perception of Nneoma's arrogance and her wilful actions against Amadioha and his priest, which eventually contribute to the death of Ndudiri, Amadioha's priest. He questions the change of attitude and would have forgiven her if not for her attitude that led to the death of Ndudiri.

When the two acolytes want to fulfill their vows, a pledge of their lives "to perfect" (Diala, 1995, p. 56), Ndudiri's death, which they reveal in the presence of Nneoma, Ekere shares the earlier perception of Ndudiri that Nneoma remains untouchable for desecrating the lore of the land when he wants to kill Nneoma, but he remembers that "Amadioha's wrath which encircles her/ Makes her sacrosanct, shields her from human harm" (Diala, 1995, p. 58). The reason why Ekere wants to kill Nneoma is because she has heard their oath, which they believe she will make a public event if she is not killed, but to avoid being encircled by Amadioha's wrath, he leaves

her. However, Okere wants her dead and draws his dagger to murder her. Ekere comes to her rescue, and in the process, Okere stabs Ekere. Ekere cries in pain, and the cry moves Nneoma, who takes Ekere's dagger and stabs Okere again and again. Okere dies but calls Nneoma a 'witch' (Diala, 1995, p. 60). Ekere too dies from the stabbing of Okere. Nneoma, too, drinks poison and dies.

The tragic essence of the drama is caused by Amadioha's pious nature and impartiality. The death of Amakwere, who is struck by Amadioha, and the attempt to cleanse the land lead to the catastrophe as humans make mistakes in the appropriation of the rites of cleansing. This misappropriation leads to the tragic events that pervade the drama. Nneoma denounces the traditional lore and kisses the corpse (of her husband), an act forbidden by the gods and men. Ndudiri, who has not witnessed such a sacrilege, offers himself an expiation to appease the god he serves. His acolytes, sworn to join their leader, kill themselves, and Nneoma drinks poison and dies too. The tragedy in the drama is linked to humans' attempt to question the divine nature of the gods (Amadioha) in the mediation of justice. Amadioha's justice is questioned by Nneoma, who, despite knowing fully well that Amadioha struck her husband dead, links the death to human evil machinations. The linkage shrouds her sense of reasoning as she kisses a corpse that should not be touched by anyone. Her death in the shrine of Amadioha, though through a suicide, suggests that her actions, which the society abhors and vilifies, are also rejected and loathed by Amadioha. If not, she would have been kept alive by Amadioha to testify to what she beholds in the shrine, as Okere asserts, but she dies as well; thus there is no one to reveal to the community the cause of the death of Okere and Ekere in Amadioha's shrine.

Amadioha's justice, despite the tragic experiences that pervade the drama, is once more established with the death of Nneoma, whose actions and words question and disregard the just nature of Amadioha. Amadioha's justice in the drama knows no bounds as, in the cause of cleansing the land, he kills, though indirectly, his priest, even though he chooses self-expiation as a means of cleansing the desecrated land; this also affects Ndudiri's acolytes, Ekere and Okere, who vow to join their master in his chosen journey of self-expiation. Amadioha also enforces and guards the lore of the land in making sure that Nneoma dies. Her death is to serve as a warning to anyone who may have been struck between the deaths of his or her loved one and desecrate the land, thinking that Amadioha, a god that abhors evil, will justify his or her actions and spare him or her if he or she goes contrary to the norms and laws of the land.

Conclusion

The desecration of the sacredness of Amadioha in his relationship with humanity, which ought not to be desecrated, breaks the structural requisite, a "pattern or action (or operation) necessary for the continued existence of the unit" (Levy, 1968). Every action of humanity to restore calmness and order leads to tragedy, as experienced in the drama. The attempt to enforce Amadioha's justice by humans leads to not only Okere's death but also to that of his fellow Ekere. Okere and Ekere, who know that the wrath of Amadioha encircles the head of Nneoma, should not have attempted to kill one whom Amadioha's wrath encircles. Nneoma's stabbing of him indicates that Amadioha is not happy with his attempt to kill the one who has been marked out to be killed by him (Amadioha). Ndudiri, their master, never touched her; rather, he surrendered himself, a martyr to cleanse the defiled land instead of killing her. Okere would have also followed the footsteps of his master and left one who has been destined to die by Amadioha. Amadioha, as the archetypal guard of traditional norms, lore, and laws in the Igbo

cosmos, does not harbor evil nor condone it, no matter the personality that is involved. Even when his priests act in vendetta, he sanctions them. The tragic experiences in *The Pyre* are because of Amadioha's archetypal nature as a god of justice in the Igbo cosmos.

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