THE URBAN/RURAL CONFLICT IN AFRICAN LITERATURE: AN EXAMINATION OF SELECTED WORKS BY IGBO AUTHORS

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INTRODUCTION

In this paper, the conflict between the urban and the rural is examined in earlier works of literature of various Igbo authors. There are several passages in their writings that illustrate this conflict, using these themes and sub-themes: 1) Corruption, 2) Fertility and Sterility, 3) the Role of Village Associations, and 4) the "Urban/Rural Conflict Journey." Another theme, "filth," often offers strong contrasts between the city's filth, especially its toilets, and the cleanliness of rural life. This theme is not examined here, as the works cited do not offer much proof. However, the list of further readings will offer many examples, especially of urban filth, for those able to bear reading such graphic details.

The duality of the urban and the rural settings are discussed: The city appeals to youth who live in rural areas for its amenities, opportunities, and excitement, while it offers some of the least desirable aspects of society, including blatant corruption. On the other hand, city dwellers yearn for their rural upbringing, recalling a tranquil, orderly time, yet the sheer boredom and suffocating, controlling life in the village is what drove them away and keeps them from permanently returning. A few of the authors have some of their characters move restlessly, on this "journey," from rural areas to cities, back to rural areas, and back to cities.

Igbo writers, unlike many others who write on the same conflict, often present stories where city dwellers maintain an urbanized version of village associations. (This paper is based, in part, on a larger work that includes writers from elsewhere in Nigeria and from several other African countries. See list of recommended sources and further readings.)

Authors for this paper include Chinua Achebe (*Things Fall Apart, No Longer at Ease, A Man of the People,* and *Girls at War*), Clement Agunwa (*More Than Once*), Cyprian Ekwensi (*Beautiful Feathers, Lokotown and Other Stories, People of the City,* and *Jagua Nana*), Speedy Eric ("Mabel the Sweet

Honey That Poured Away," Onitsha Market Literature), Nkem Nwanko (*Danda*), Flora Nwapa (*Idu*), and Onuora Nzekwu (*Wand of Noble Wood*).

CORRUPTION

Corruption is conspicuous in rural literature by its absence. It appears only when introduced by the modern Western world and the things that world has brought into the rural society: politics, law courts, a cash economy, and competition for things that did not exist in traditional society, such as places in a school.

An example of modern corruption in rural literature is found in Chinua Achebe's short story, "The Voter," in *Girls at War*. Rufus ("Roof") Okeke, a local man who has been working in Port Harcourt as a bicycle repairer's assistant, comes home to campaign for the re-election of another local man to a Ministerial post. His fellow villagers are exceedingly proud of the fact that they have a local man in such a position, but it is not until Roof gives them two shillings each, and then, after much discussion, two more, that they agree that they will vote for his candidate. Roof is himself bought by the supporters of the rival candidate, mixing traditional with modern, when he takes the bribe and then is forced to swear on an *iyi* (a powerful fetish) that he will indeed vote the way they want him to. So, Roof, once a rural man but now of the city, works for another former rural man, the Minister, now of the city, and both sides of the campaign come into the village and bribe their way to election day.[1]

For many of the characters in urban literature, corruption is a way of life. It is such a common theme in describing urban life that readers come to expect corruption to be a central theme. In these tales, corruption is often a topic that everyone always talks about, but no one does anything about. And, often, there is denial: it is always the "other person" who is involved in bribery, but rarely oneself.

Obi Okonkwo of Achebe's *No Longer at Ease*, beset by mounting problems upon his return to Lagos from overseas, finally succumbs to taking bribes to award scholarships. He becomes so cynical about it all that he even takes bribes from those who, unknown to themselves, are already safely on the list of scholarship winners.

> "You dance very well," his whispered as she pressed herself against him breathing very fast and hard. He put her arms round his neck and brought her lips within a centimetre of his. They no longer paid any attention to the beat of the high-life. Obi steered her towards his bedroom. She made a half-hearted show of resisting, then followed…. Others came. People would say that Mr. So-and-so was a gentleman. He would take money, but he would do his stuff, which was a big

> advertisement; and others would follow. But Obi stoutly refused to countenance anyone who did not possess the minimum educational and other requirements. On that he was unshakeable.[2]

He speaks of honesty in what he is doing, as he feels he can make a distinction between being, one might say, an honest crook and a crooked crook. He does consider himself to have scruples despite what he allows himself to do.

Just as he vows that he will quit doing it, he is caught and put on trial. When he is brought into court, the supreme irony of corruption takes place: Some spectators have bribed someone else for a doctor's certificate to be freed from their work to sit in the court and watch this case of bribery:

> Every available space in the court-room was taken up. There were almost as many people standing as sitting. The case had been the talk of Lagos for several weeks and on this last day anyone who could possibly leave his job was there to hear the judgement. Some Civil Servants paid as much as ten shillings and sixpence to obtain a doctor's certificate of illness for the day.[3]

In urban literature, corruption exists in the form of political pay-offs, bribes to any number of people to forestall or eliminate trouble, or get something thought unavailable otherwise, and a corruption of the soul because of one's deep involvement in illegal and immoral activities. Some people suffer because of this corruption, yet others prosper. Money changes hands, and, in many cases, everyone gets something, perhaps freedom, a job, or a scholarship, on the one hand, and money or material possessions, on the other.

People win and people lose when it comes to the alternate theme of village justice, as well, and, despite the sorrow one feels when one looks into the literature at innocent persons being punished, often violently, one comes away with a satisfaction that, most of the time, most of the people were convinced that they were right, that the guilty were punished, and that the society was served the application of this kind of justice. Causes were found for otherwise unexplainable circumstances and one's mind could then rest at ease. By and large, justice was objectively dealt to the people at hand and the kinds of accusations leveled at the practice of justice in the urban environment were not applicable in the rural societies.

FERTILITY AND STERILITY

Pregnancy, welcomed with joy and celebration in rural literature, is often a cause for alarm in urban literature. In the latter, the father often does not want the child. Sometimes, he is reluctant – or outright refuses – to acknowledge paternity, whether he believes he is responsible or not. Sometimes, the woman does not want the child, either. Pregnancy often casts a tragic pall over the literary work. Abortion, often conducted by unsafe methods, is the result, frequently with serious consequences for the woman.

In Cyprian Ekwensi's *People of the City*, Amusa Sango, a band leader and crime reporter, is faced with the news that he is about to become a father – unless something is done about it. Aina, one of his girlfriends, informs him:

> "I want you to help me because… I am pregnant!"
>
> "*What!*" All the drowsiness vanished from his eyes….
>
> "So, you're pregnant. And you think I am the father—"
>
> "Since that night at the beach, I have not been feeling well. I didn't want to come till I was sure."
>
> "Enough!"
>
> "…My mother is prepared to take you to court to claim damages if you refuse to marry me." She kept her eyes on him and smiled. "Perhaps you'll let us have about ten pounds to maintain ourselves till the child is born."
>
> "At a time like this! And you have the guts to smile. Oh, what a fool I've been!"
>
> "But everybody knows you're my lover, Amusa; it's only you that keep making a fuss. What's in it, after all?"
>
> "So, every time I raise my head in the world, every time I collect a few hard-earned pounds, you, Aina, come and stand in my way – with a new misfortune! Look, do you know this is blackmail? I could take you to the police – they know your record."
>
> "I'm not afraid of them. What do I care?"
>
> …. "I'll give you what I can now, Aina. And I beg you to keep away from me – for good! the baby cannot be mine, and you know it! I'm helping you because… well, because of memories!"

He is trapped, yet he believes he is not to blame or, at the least, not the only one. As he tells his friend, First Trumpet:

> "The child is not mine! Certainly not, and she knows it. if that girl continues to pester me, I shall…"

"Kill her? Then you'll hang. For such an irresponsible creature, too!"[4]

He doesn't kill her, but he does come close. She later comes back to get more money out of him. He beats her and she has a miscarriage at his apartment:

> He could not decide whether to be pleased or sorry, for Aina was having a miscarriage...he did not completely forget the unsatisfied desire to avenge the injustice he had suffered at her hands. He was glad she might live; glad she had not involved him in a sensational accident.[5]

Abortions or miscarriages remove the responsibility and demands of parenthood, as well as the opportunity to view the birth as a joyous occasion which will ensure the parent, especially the father, that there is someone around who will take care of him when he is old, someone who will bury him.

Aina's mother is a troublesome woman. She went to see Sango's mother in hospital to tell her about Aina's condition in hopes of hurting Sango. But the reverse came true, as she tells Sango:

> "Sango, your mother was a wonderful woman. She loved you so much! Do you know she died of *happiness*? When she heard you were to be a father, she was so so glad. She said, 'Thank God, he is becoming something at last.' ...You must forgive me, Sango," she said and pressed the edge of her cloth to her eyes. "You see, I went there to spoil your name before your mother. Because of Aina, but your mother was above it all!"[6]

His mother is the only person who does not fit neatly into the urban landscape. She has come from her hometown to Lagos for medical treatment. We know little about her, but the above does reveal that she is the only one who is happy about Sango fathering a child. It does not matter that Sango does not love Aina, nor that Aina is a woman of questionable repute. What is important is children, and no one else has realized that, or agrees with that, being creatures of the urban environment.

Cyprian Ekwensi's Jagua Nana also becomes pregnant. She does not get pregnant in all the years she has lived in Lagos, but once she comes back to settle down in her old village in Eastern Nigeria, she takes up briefly with a passerby and manages to conceive. But, like many other Ekwensi characters, she finds that her joy is temporary. The child dies:

> On the third day, Jagua put Nnochi to the breast. It was early evening and her mother and Rosa had not come in from the farm. Jagua felt a sudden slackening of the lips on her nipple….
> Rosa and her mother came in from the forest and found her silent and stiff as an effigy before the oracle. She pressed the dead baby to herself and blubbering, would not part with it.[7]

For Jagua Nana, it is both urban sterility and rural fertility, even though she does lose the child. After all those years of living in the vast urban environment in Lagos, she returns home without a child. but, after a few months of rural life (and a casual liaison with a stranger), she becomes pregnant. The loss of her baby sends her back on her spiral and she will now desert the rural area once again and head back for the urban one, childless once more.

Pregnancy is a theme of urban literature, as well as rural literature, but it is a negative theme. In rural literature, having children is one's whole purpose. For so many reasons, it is necessary to procreate. Barrenness is a stigma no woman wants.

An even more melodramatic, didactic piece of fiction concerning the same theme is an example of Onitsha Market Literature, Speedy Eric's "Mabel the Sweet Honey that Poured Away." The use of language throughout the story is so original, and often so bizarre, that the reader is hard put to have sympathy with any of the characters, as the story is found to be too entertaining. Yet there is a feeling of guilt, as expressed by Adrian Roscoe in his book of criticism, *Mother is Gold*:

> But the pamphlets…are not aimed at the outside reader; and leafing through their pages, one gets, besides this accidental mirth, a guilty feeling of trespassing on private land.[8]

But a moral is indeed intended, no matter how it is put. It is the wicked city as its worst, involving the ruin and then the death of Mabel. She had fled from Onitsha to Port Harcourt and set herself up at the Palace Hotel as a prostitute. The following quote is the end of the story:

> She lasted only three months at Palace Hotel…many young men had left the town unable to continue their business, having been sucked to the bare-bone by Mabel….
> How did the sweet honey pour away? Within two months of her arrival in Port Harcourt Mabel found out that she was to expect a baby in the next six months.
> It was horrible. She thought how she could afford to keep a baby in her own type of life….

> She decided on one thing. Do away with the child! But inexperienced and young as she was she did not know that the third month was a dangerous one for expectant women.
> She took her contraceptives and in overdose too. The next day the result came. In the middle of the day the abortion took place, but a hell of blood followed….
> Inside the lavatory our seventeen years old sweet honey was pouring away….
> The blood flowed freely, unchecked, by about four thirty the last drop that held her together flowed away. And she collapsed and died.[9]

Speedy Eric, like the other writers of Onitsha Market Literature, deems it important to give his readers a moral, and the moral here is that loose living, especially when pursued to the degree that Mabel pursued it, will lead to death.

In Flora Nwapa's novel, *Idu*, Idu's fellow villager, Ojiugo, left her husband, Amarajeme, to live with another man, Obukodi, supposedly because she has no child and thinks her moving can rectify this. (It does.) Uzoechi, one of the village women, is shocked by this unusual behavior:

> "And Obukodi's other wives?" Uzoechi asked, still not believing. "What will they do? This thing is bad. That's not how our people behave. Obukodi and Amarajeme are friends. What's wrong with them?"[10]

But why children at all? A question these characters would not need to ask, though they are constantly *answering* this question.

Peter Obi, the bachelor of Onorua Nzekwu's *Wand of Noble Wood*, gives some of the reasons to a non-Igbo friend:

> "…children among us are priceless possessions. To us, the primary aim of marriage is to have children, particularly boys, who will perpetuate our names. Those who show an interest in my marriage are considering my age. The essential thing to them is that I should start having my own children, with a legitimate wife of course, as early in life as convention dictates….
>
> "In the past it was necessary to have children early. Before you aged, the boys were strong enough to work on our farm, the size of which depended on the amount of free labor that was available. Larger and more farms meant more food production and therefore more wealth. The girls among them spelled wealth too. Suitors came, they paid handsome bride prices; evidence of their ability to maintain their

> wives. Today what do we have? A new social set up based upon a cash economy. A good number of us depend on monthly salaries. If one had children, he would be expected to give them school, college, and if possible, university education. It is not how many children, but how well you have trained them to fit into present-day society, that counts.[11]

THE ROLE OF VILLAGE ASSOCIATIONS

An inter-tribal marriage in Lagos is the subject of "Marriage Is a Private Matter," a short story in Achebe's *Girls at War*. The village association of the groom accepts his wife, though with a bit of coldness at first, but his father turns a deaf ear to any thought of acceptance (going as far as returning the bride's portion of the wedding photo) until, a few years later, the wife writes him about his grandsons who want to see him, and he breaks down and relents to have them come home. The climate of Lagos, then, is more liberal, but not by much.[12] The feelings of dissatisfaction towards a marriage with an outsider are lessened by a cosmopolitan atmosphere, but the strength in tradition, bolstered by the association of clansmen, is evident.

The masqueraders in rural Igbo society play the role of meting out justice in one other book, *More Than Once*, by Clement Agunwa. Nweke Nwakor was to have been babysitting his little sister, but he left her alone, and the child fell off a platform in the house and injured herself. His mother wants him punished. She is talking to the palm-wine tapper who saw the whole thing:

> "Now, let's think about this child Nweke. No amount of beating or starving has done him any good. Do you think you can help in any way to check him?"
>
> "Well… I'll go and tap my wine quickly and the voice of a masquerade may be heard this evening."[13]

And, sure enough, it is. Nweke has gone to the river to get some water for his mother, in an attempt to curry her favor. He is set upon by a masquerade and becomes frightened. Rather than flee, he obeys:

> The masquerade lifted Nweke on his shoulder and made for the bad bush at the outskirt of town. His crying was swallowed up by the general appeal of the public: some sincere, others mocking.
>
> ….Very close to the bad bush, the masquerade put him down, whipped him several times and asked him to narrate how he threw the baby down, which he did without hesitation. The masquerade then clapped for him and asked him to dance a dance of guilt which

> he also did, after owning up to several offences he had not committed.[14]

So Nweke is punished for his crime and rural justice continues, sure that it punishes the guilty and lets the innocent go free.

In addition to such controls as the masquerade and the oracle, the unwritten traditions and customs, there is the social control in the rural area of what is done and what is not done to avoid being talked about or being shunned by one's fellows. This control is a very effective one, and when people ignore this kind of custom, they pay for it by, at the least, being gossiped about, or the most, being ostracized from certain groups or certain activities without being physically harmed or openly, publicly humiliated.

In the urban area, on the other hand, people are much freer to do what they will without fear of being ignored. There are too many people, the society is too loose-knit, and too many urban residents simply do not care what you do or do not do, having fled to the urban area themselves to escape that rural social control over their lives. Here, too, the contrast is evident by the absence of such control in the urban environment (except, perhaps, in the urban-based village associations).

In *More Than Once*, there is a protective union in Onitsha for the men of the village of Ndigwe. There is a feeling of superiority about the group as explained below:

> It was a Sunday afternoon, the Eke Sunday afternoon when the sons of Ndigwe at Onitsha met in their miniature parliament to legislate for their home town some thirty miles away. They, as "abroad members," were supposed to be broader in outlook than their less fortunate brothers encaged within the thick walls of their compounds at home.[15]

Those still in the village, however, know the ability of such associations to help them "get up." The headmaster of the village school writes to this Onitsha-based group or assistance and the speaker below, a Mr. Nwadiaka, exhorts them to meet the challenges of modern times:

> I will not speak long. All I am saying is the Ndigwe is used to great deeds. Our fathers never allowed neighbouring towns or villages to put fingers into their eyes. Why should we today? You heard the letter from our headmaster which has been read, requesting the extension of the school building to enable the school to read standard six next year. It means work and it means money. Shall we dig up our fathers from the grave to come and do it? The days of dane gun battles

> are over. This is the type of challenge that faces our own generation today. Shall we be found cowards? Our fathers will disown us from the grave.[16]

The "days of the dane gun battles" may be over, but the days of "getting up" through education and better jobs in the nearby urban areas are now at hand. Because of the allegiance to their motherland, this money, which might have gone for improvements in Onitsha, instead goes back to their village, as they see their staying in Onitsha as a temporary thing.

THE URBAN/RURAL CONFLICT JOURNEY

In *More Than Once*, Nweke Nwakor's departure for the town is precipitated by the fact that he and his father feel he can no longer remain in the village after coming back empty-handed from a lumbering job, a job in which he was tricked out of his money by a fellow villager, Ofodile. He is forced out of the village into the town, therefore, by modern pressures: the inability to "take up the hoe" after having lived "abroad."

> They began to deliberate on future plans. Nweke must not cross that river Niger again. But what would people think if he sat down and took up the hoe again? They would know that he had failed where others had succeeded. Ofodile might even return to tell that it was all cowardice that drove Nweke home. He would in that case be a laughing stock for all.[17]

Before Nweke had left for the lumbering camp, his father gave his son advice for his journey and for the duration of his stay:

> I have not spoken to you yet. I do not think it is necessary. But I just like to remind you of a few facts you know already.
>
> ....You know how we are," the advice ran. "Never in history had anyone of our ancestors been kidnapped, or sold into slavery for being lazy or irresponsible. We are never mentioned with stealing, or with poisoning, or with women. We do not owe. We try to live according to our means….
>
> We are not like the caterpillar that clings tenaciously to the leaf when it is slim; but having fed fat, loosens his grip and falls to the earth to be food for hens. We are like soldier ants. We never lose our grip. We bite till our head goes into the struggle and we prefer to die rather than lose. Be like us.[18]

When rural people arrive in the town or city, urban dwellers tend to be dismayed by their actions and habits. It is amazing, too, how quickly one adapts to town ways so that when a brand-new arrival comes to the residence of someone who has not been in the town that much longer, the older residents can be most disgusted with habits they themselves may have had a few years or even months before. In *More Than Once*, Nweke has left his job at the lumbering camp and stops at the house of Mr. Adigwe in Onitsha on his way home. Mr. Adigwe and his family have lived but a few years in Onitsha and he and Nweke knew one another in Ndigwe, their common village:

> ….Nweke Nwakor arrived, escorted by a schoolboy. He had a small cheap box of white wood. The carpenter who made it, if he was really a carpenter, must have used either a blunt jack-plane or a sharp matchet in planing the wood….
>
> This was the miserable burden he deposited at the entrance of the house before he knocked. He looked brown with dust collected during the long journey on dusty roads. On the whole he presented a miserable and uncultivated aspect, at least by Onitsha standards. Such a man needed conversion by the Patriotic elements of Ndigwe. Mr. Adigwe's children sent water into the bathroom for him to wash in. It was said that he did not understand the need for the towel kept for him there and that he dressed up over a moist skin and walked into the room. It was further said that he pulled one of the buckets into the latrine and defecated into it, having heard that that was the system there. Only Mrs. Adigwe had the boldness to tell him that his bushness was stinking.[19]

Yaniya, the wife of Wilson Iyari, the pharmacist/politician in Ekwensi's *Beautiful Feathers*, flees her husband and the city life of Lagos and goes to a rather improbable site, the "village of Ol' Man Forest, Emorwen," near Benin. The Ol' Man is her father. Her arrival:

> Yaniya inhaled the damp scented air of the forest. In the distance she saw the roof-tops of the three huts that comprised the village of Ol' Man Forest, Emorwen. The camp was a little clearing in the forest...the three huts were like a discovery in the jungle. Yaniya's heart bounced with joy as she set eyes on them.[20]

Yaniya spies her father in front of his house. She tells him she has left her husband in Lagos and that she is "tired." Her father gives palm wine to the driver and crew of the lorry that brought her (palm wine in which

there is not "too much water, like the one they sell to you in the town"). Then she and her father are left alone:

> Yaniya watched the lorry till it turned a corner and was hidden by the massive trunk of a tree. That was her last link with the world outside. She felt at ease...all the worries and problems of Lagos, could never reach her in this fresh-scented forest. She was safe.[21]

Safe. Safe from the troubles of her marriage, of the life she has led (she was a prostitute before she married her husband and was unfaithful to him after their marriage), of all the temptations and distractions of Lagos.

Yaniya returns to the city, at her father's urging, not because he wants her necessarily to live in Lagos again, but because he feels it is wrong that she deserted her husband. After a long separation, occasioned by the death of one of their children, they are reunited after she has thrown herself in front of him and received the political goon's bullet meant for him. She recovers, and they are all set to live happily ever after – in Lagos – at the end of the book.

Her temporary flight to the rural area to get her thoughts in order is reminiscent of Nwuke's wife's journey in Ekwensi's short story, "Lokotown." Their child has been killed and Nwuke decides to send his grieving wife back home to see her mother:

> When you have stayed at home for some time – one month, two months – come back to me. Do not come back till you know you have forgotten the past, and will face only what God has for us in the future. I, too, must change.[22]

So, she will be cleansed just as Yaniya was by going to the rural setting. There are strong attractions for someone wanting a little more variety in his or her life and it is these people who do succumb to the temptations and go to the town or the city. Ekwensi likes to let us know why his characters opted for the city. Two of his *People of the City* characters and their motivations:

> Beatrice: She made no secret of what brought her to the city: 'high life,' cars, servants, high-class foods, decent clothes, luxurious living. Since she could not earn the high life herself, she must obtain it by attachment to someone who could.[17]
>
> Aina: It was a way of life she liked. The glamorous surroundings, the taxis, the quick drinks. This was one reason why she had come to the city from her home sixty miles away: to ride in taxis, eat in fashionable hotels, to wear the *aso-ebi*, that dress that was so often and so

> ruinously prescribed like a uniform for mournings, wakings, bazaars, to have men who wore white collars to their jobs as lovers, men who could spend.[23]

Later, Beatrice dies and is buried as a pauper. Sango explains to one of her lovers that, ironically, she came to the city because she was "not content with poverty."[24]

Jagua Nana also found some of the same attractions pulled her to Lagos. She had been married to a man in Coal City, but she was bored with her life. One day, on an impulse, she went into the railway station to ask for the time table for Lagos. Her reaction:

> Lagos! The magic name. She had heard of Lagos where the girls were glossy, worked in offices like the men, danced, smoked, wore high-heeled shoes and narrow slacks, and were "free" and "fast" with their favours. She heard that the people in Lagos did not have to go to bed at eight o'clock. Anyone who cared could go roaming the streets or wandering from one nightspot to the other right up till morning. The night spots never shut, and they were open all night and every night; not like "here" where at 8 p.m. "latest" everywhere was shut down and the streets deserted, so that it looked odd to be wandering about.
> When she came away from the railway counter, Jagua felt a sudden uneasiness. There was something sinful in her act, and from that moment on, she began to look at her man with a detached air. To her, he was good as dead. Dead and buried in her heart though he did not know it. She gave him her body, and thought instead of the slim young men in the dark bow-ties and elegantly cut lounge suits.
> She cooked for him, but longed for quiet restaurants where the lining was velvet and the music was soft and wine glasses clinked and men spoke in whispers to girls who burst suddenly into outraged laughter but were devils in nylon skins.[25]

Jagua Nana does not hark back to her childhood but to what might have been in her adulthood if either she had not come to Lagos or she had left before she did. She does finally leave, but before that happens, we are reminded elsewhere in the book that she is dissatisfied with her lot:

> Sometimes she talked of going to Onitsha by the Niger. There she hoped to become one of the Merchant Princesses who controlled tens of thousands of pounds. Freddie had an idea that she was capable of doing it, but she would not leave Lagos. Or while in Lagos she would not exert herself. It was three years now since she had been to Ghana. The Tropicana had sapped all her energy. She seemed to be one of

> those women who are always trying to prove to me that they are still young. And to do so, she must always remain focused in their sights. Going away from the social centre might make them forget her.[26]

When she returns to visit her village, she is welcomed, albeit with curious stares and whispers. Jagua Nana romanticizes her childhood as she walks along the path leading into the village:

> The smell of wet humus and damp undergrowth brought back memories of her girlhood days when she ran errands along this same lane for her mother. The hot tears filled her eyes and blurred the forest. She saw her father's house, roofed with zinc, standing at the end of the courtyard. The waterhole in front was new to her, but not the carpenter's bench standing under the iroko tree. Ten years! And this tree where she had played see-saw with the children was still standing there.
>
> A woman came along the road and met Jagua as she was coming towards the house. She said, "Welcome, our daughter," and wiped her hands on a big cocoyam leaf. She stared at Jagua without recognising her until she said, "I am the daughter of the Pastor," and then a loud jubilant cry went up. The cry was taken up and soon all over Ogabu it was known that the daughter of the pastor had come from Lagos. Little boys…ran away from Jagua because she looked strange in those down-to-earth surroundings.
>
> In Ogabu the people tilled the soil and drank river water and ate yams and went to church but came home to worship their family oracles. They believed that in a village where every man has his own yam plots, there is much happiness in the hearts of the men and the women and children; but where it is only one man who has the yam plots there is nothing but anger and envy; and strife breaks out with little provocation. Jagua knew that the men thought only about the land and its products and the women helped them make the land more fruitful. So that her city ways became immediately incongruous. The film of make-up on her skin acquired an ashen pallor. The women fixed their eyes on the painted eyebrows and one child called out in Igbo, "Mama! Her lips are running blood!..." Jagua heard another woman say, "She walks as if her bottom will drop off. I cannot understand what the girl has become."[27]

Surely other people from this area living in Lagos have sent word back about her, if her family has not already guessed what she is doing. (Her brother speaks of her as "the wayward one.") But Ekwensi allows her a reasonably friendly welcome, perhaps because he so much wants to

point out the contrast between the peace, harmony, and beauty of the countryside and the hustle and bustle and filth of Jagua's Lagos:

> ….Jagua never thought she would be able to adapt herself to the new life. She found, after a few months of it that the atmosphere in Ogabu had a quality about it totally different from the Lagos atmosphere. That driving, voluptuous and lustful element which existed in the very air of Lagos, that something which awakened the sleeping sexual instincts in all men and women and turned them into animals always in heat.[28]

After she becomes pregnant, she reflects on a move to the city once again:

> Even if she went back to the Coast to live, to Lagos or to Port Harcourt, things would be on a new footing. She would never again be so reckless with the ingredients of the fast life and faster oblivion.[29]

Her mother senses that Jagua has not forgotten Lagos, and so, after the death of her baby, she approaches her with the question of what she is going to do now:

> "When you are strong again, Jagua, what you goin' to do?"….It was a week after the burial of Nnochi and slowly Jagua was beginning to see the sun, to feel a thirst for water and hunger for a little food….
> "Mama, I don't know yet. But I wan' some place – not too far to Ogabu. Dere I kin trade. I kin come here when I like for look you. An wan' try Onitsha wedder I kin become Merchant Princess. I already get experience of de business…. I kin buy me own lorry and me own shop by de river. I goin' to join de society of de women an' make frien' with dem. I sure to succeed."
> As she spoke, she saw the relief mount into her mother's eyes. "Is good," she said. "I fear before whedder you wantin' for go back Lagos. Now is good I got me daughter on dis side of de Niger."[30]

The idea of becoming a Merchant Princess in Onitsha, the same idea she has thought about again and again in Lagos, is now to become real. But will she remain even in that urban environment? She seems to have thought too much and too often in the past about such places as Lagos and Port Harcourt. Margaret Laurence in her book of criticism, *Long Drums and Cannons*, has the final word on that argument:

> From everything that has ever happened to Jagua, it is only too apparent that the solid life of a market trader woman is not for her. It is easy to imagine her being drawn back to Lagos, staying on and on there until finally it is too late. But she will go down, when she does, like a ruined queen.[31]

Whether or not Ms. Laurence is right, we do know that Jagua is leaving the rural area, once again, for an urban one, be it medium-sized Onitsha, or sprawling Lagos or Port Harcourt. The city has reclaimed her.

CONCLUSION

One could argue that, in these examples and others, too much emphasis is placed upon the evils and troubles found in the urban environment and, on the other hand, the tranquility and fairness of life in rural areas. However, the writers have had their own experiences in both worlds and are acting not only as novelists and short-story writers, but as reporters on conditions, attitudes, and an abundance or absence of certain ways of life. This paper, however briefly, has examined some of the major themes exhibited in the descriptions of urban and rural life in the earlier works of Igbo authors.

NOTES

[1] Chinua Achebe, "The Voter," in *Girls at War* (London: Heinemann, 1972), 11-19.

[2] Chinua Achebe, *No Longer at Ease* (London: Heinemann, 1963), 168-69.

[3] Achebe, *No Longer at Ease,*1-2.

[4] Cyprian Ekwensi, *People of the City*, 137.

[5] Ekwensi, *People of the City*, 147-48.

[6] Ekwensi, *People of the City*, 148.

[7] Cyprian Ekwensi, *Jagua Nana* (London: Panther, 1963), 144.

[8] Adrian Roscoe, *Mother Is Gold* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 151.

[9] Speedy Eric, "Mable the Sweet Honey That Poured Away," in *Onitsha Market Literature*, E.N. Obiechina, ed., (London: Heinemann, 1972), 109-110.

[10] Flora Nwapa, *Idu* (London: Heinemann, 1970), 105.

[11] Onuora Nzekwu, *Wand of Noble Wood* (New York: New American Library, 1963), 25-26.

[12] Chinua Achebe, "Marriage Is a Private Matter," in *Girls at War* (London: Heinemann, 1972), 20-22.

[13] Clement Agunwa, *More Than Once* (London: Longman, 1967), 59.

[14] Agunwa, *More Than Once*, 59-62.

[15] Agunwa, *More Than Once*, 1.

[16] Agunwa, *More Than Once*, 9-10.

[17] Agunwa, *More Than Once*, 138-39.

[18] Agunwa, *More Than Once*, 118-19.
[19] Agunwa, *More Than Once,* 138-39.
[20] Cyprian Ekwensi, *Beautiful Feathers* (London: Heinemann, 1966), 94-96.
[21] Ekwensi, *Beautiful Feathers*, 94-96.
[22] Cyprian Ekwensi, "Lokotown," in *Lokotown and Other Stories* (London: Heinemann, 1966), 38.
[23] Ekwensi, *People of the City*, 88.
[24] Ekwensi, *People of the City*, 145.
[25] Ekwensi, *Jagua Nana*, 126.
[26] Ekwensi, *Jagua Nana,* 19-20.
[27] Ekwensi, *Jagua Nana*, 52-54.
[28] Ekwensi, *Jagua Nana*, 133-36.
[29] Ekwensi, *Jagua Nana*, 143.
[30] Ekwensi, *Jagua Nana*, 144.
[31] Margaret Laurence, *Long Drums and Cannons* (London: Macmillan, 1968), no pagination

RECOMMENDED SOURCES AND FURTHER READINGS

These themes and others, particularly "filth," are examined by many other authors from Nigeria and other African countries. Below is a list for further readings on the urban/rural conflict in African literature:

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