

Elechi Amadi. *Estrangement*. (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Educational Books, 1986) 244 pp., \$7.50 paper.

Elechi Amadi's new novel concerns the disruption of lives, traditions, and institutions caused by the Nigerian Civil War and modern society's emphasis on individualism. The novel opens in Port Harcourt—Amadi's own native surroundings—in 1970, at the end of the Biafran conflict. The principal character, Alekiri, has had a child by her Hausa soldier lover, Major Sule Dansuku, who had rescued her from the war front, where she had become separated from her husband, Ibekwe, and daughter. This imminent return of her husband to whom she remains married and the impending conflict of custom (Ibekwe's duty to reconcile along with accepting the new child) creates anxiety in the cast of characters.

Amadi's title, *Estrangement*, appears apropos, for the meaning of the term implies a separation or disruption of a bond that exists between one or more persons, a group, or institution. There are several estrangements which the author addresses: women vs. men, poor vs. rich, urban vs. rural, village tradition vs. urban individualism, friendships, husband-wife, parent-child, sisters, and government-public.

As the author leads the reader through the many complications of a society trying to recuperate from disarray, one is immediately struck by both the physical and psychological devastation that internal societal conflict can cause for individuals and in turn, the developing country as a whole. The traditional idea of what is good for the group appears lost in the modern life style of individual striving. Long-time friendships fade in the wake of striving for higher status. As one observes, traditional beliefs of national/community good, family unit, tribal unity appear to be waning and being replaced in modern society by the drive for money, education, and power.

Amadi's background as a playwright is competently demonstrated in the way he presents compelling dramatic confrontations. The flow of the language, however, appears somewhat labored. Other reviewers have stated that his depiction of urban dialogue is almost as compelling as his presentation of traditional forms and village customs.

Once the reader begins to empathize with Alekiri's plight, the novel becomes a good read. The reader is carried skillfully along towards unsettling conclusions, the most disturbing of which is how women and men relate to one another.

—James H. Bracy
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