

SURA YA KUMI NA NANE

The young church in Mbanta had a few crises early in its life. At first the clan had assumed that it would not survive. But it had gone on living and gradually becoming stronger. The clan was worried, but not overmuch. If a gang of efulefu decided to live in the Evil Forest it was their own affair. When one came to think of it, the Evil Forest was a fit home for

Kanisa changa huko Mbanta lilikuwa na matatizo machache mapema katika maisha yake. Mwanzoni ukoo huo ulidhani kwamba hautaishi. Lakini ilikuwa imeendelea kuishi na polepole ikawa na nguvu. Ukoo ulikuwa na wasiwasi, lakini sio kupita kiasi. Ikiwa genge la efulefu lingeamua kuishi kwenye Msitu Mwovu lilikuwa ni jambo lao wenyewe.

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such undesirable people. It was true they were rescuing twins from the bush, but they never brought them into the village. As far as the villagers were concerned, the twins still remained where they had been thrown away. Surely the earth goddess would not visit the sins of the missionaries on the innocent villagers?

But on one occasion the missionaries had tried to over step the bounds. Three converts had gone into the village and boasted openly that all the gods were dead and impotent and that they were prepared to defy them by burning all their shrines.

"Go and burn your mothers' genitals," said one of the priests. The men were seized and beaten until they streamed with blood. After that nothing happened for a long time between the church and the clan.

But stories were already gaining ground that the white man had not only brought a religion but also a government. It was said that they

Wakati mtu alikuja kufikiria juu yake, Msitu Mwovu ulikuwa nyumba inayofaa kwa watu wasiohitajika. Ni kweli walikuwa wakiwaokoa mapacha msituni, lakini hawakuwahi kuwaleta kijijini. Kwa upande wa wanakijiji, mapacha hao bado walibaki pale walipokuwa wametupwa. Hakika mungu wa dunia asingezuru dhambi za wamisionari kwa wanakijiji wasio na hatia?

Lakini pindi moja wamishonari walijaribu kuvuka mipaka. Waongofu watatu walikuwa wameingia katika kijiji hicho na kujigamba waziwazi kwamba miungu yote ilikuwa imekufa na haina uwezo wowote na kwamba walikuwa wamejitayarisha kuwapinga kwa kuchoma vihekalu vyao vyote.

"Nendeni mkachome sehemu za siri za mama zenu," mmoja wa makuhani alisema. Watu hao walikamatwa na kupigwa hadi kumwaga damu. Baada ya hapo hakuna kilichotokea kwa muda mrefu kati ya kanisa na ukoo. Lakini hadithi zilikuwa tayari kupata msingi kwamba mzungu hakuwa ameleta tu dini bali pia serikali. Ilisemekana kwamba

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had built a place of judgment in Umuofia to protect the followers of their religion. It was even said that they had hanged one man who killed a missionary.

Although such stories were now often told they looked like fairytales in Mbanta and did not as yet affect the relationship between the new church and the clan. There was no question of killing a missionary here, for Mr. Kiaga, despite his madness, was quite harmless. As for his converts, no one could kill them without having to flee from the clan, for in spite of their worthlessness they still belonged to the clan. And so nobody gave serious thought to the stories about the white man's government or the consequences of killing the Christians. If they became more troublesome than they already were they would simply be driven out of the clan.

And the little church was at that moment too deeply absorbed in its own troubles to annoy the clan. It all began over the question of admitting outcasts.

walikuwa wamejenga mahali pa hukumu huko Umuofia ili kuwalinda wafuasi wa dini yao. Hata ilisemekana kwamba walikuwa wamemnyonga mtu mmoja ambaye alimuua mmishonari.

Ingawa hadithi kama hizo sasa zilisimuliwa mara nyingi zilionekana kama hadithi za hadithi huko Mbanta na bado hazikuathiri uhusiano kati ya kanisa jipya na ukoo. Hakukuwa na suala la kumuua mmishonari hapa, kwani Bwana Kiaga, licha ya wazimu wake, hakuwa na madhara kabisa. Ama waongofu wake, hakuna aliyeweza kuwaua bila ya kuukimbia ukoo huo, kwani pamoja na kutokuwa na thamani kwao bado walikuwa wa ukoo huo. Na hivyo hakuna mtu aliyefikiria kwa uzito hadithi kuhusu serikali ya wazungu au matokeo ya kuwaua Wakristo. Ikiwa wangekuwa wasumbufu zaidi kuliko walivyokuwa tayari wangefukuzwa tu nje ya ukoo.

Na kanisa dogo wakati huo lilikuwa limezama sana katika matatizo yake yenyewe ili kuudhi ukoo. Yote ilianza juu ya swali la kuwakubali watu waliofukuzwa.

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These outcasts, or osu, seeing that the new religion welcomed twins and such abominations, thought that it was possible that they would also be received. And so one Sunday two of them went into the church. There was an immediate stir, but so great was the work the new religion had done among the converts that they did not immediately leave the church when the outcasts came in. Those who found themselves nearest to them merely moved to another seat. It was a miracle. But it only lasted till the end of the service. The whole church raised a protest and was about to drive these people out, when Mr. Kiaga stopped them and began to explain.

"Before God," he said, "there is no slave or free. We are all children of God and we must receive these our brothers."

"You do not understand," said one of the converts. "What will the heathen say of us when they hear that we receive osu into our midst? They will laugh."

Watu hao waliofukuzwa, au osu, walipoona kwamba dini hiyo mpya ilikaribisha mapacha na machukizo hayo, walifikiri kwamba inawezekana kwamba wao pia wangepokelewa. Na kwa hiyo Jumapili moja wawili wao waliingia kanisani. Kulikuwa na msukosuko wa mara moja, lakini kazi ambayo dini mpya ilikuwa imefanya kati ya waongofu ilikuwa kubwa sana hivi kwamba hawakuondoka kanisani mara wale waliotengwa walipoingia. Wale waliojipata kuwa karibu nao walihamia tu kiti kingine. Ilikuwa ni muujiza. Lakini ilidumu tu hadi mwisho wa huduma. Kanisa zima liliibua maandamano na kutaka kuwatoa watu hawa, ndipo Bwana Kiaga alipowasimamisha na kuanza kueleza.

"Mbele za Mungu," alisema, "hakuna mtumwa au mtu huru. Sisi sote ni watoto wa Mungu na lazima tuwapokee hawa ndugu zetu."

"Huelewi," alisema mmoja wa waongofu. "Wapagani watasema nini juu yetu watakauposikia kwamba tunapokea osu katikati yetu? Watacheka."

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"Let them laugh," said Mr. Kiaga. "God will laugh at them on the judgment day. Why do the nations rage and the peoples imagine a vain thing? He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh. The Lord shall have them in derision."

"You do not understand," the convert maintained. "You are our teacher, and you can teach us the things of the new faith. But this is a matter which we know." And he told him what an osu was.

He was a person dedicated to a god, a thing set apart--a taboo for ever, and his children after him. He could neither marry nor be married by the free-born. He was in fact an outcast, living in a special area of the village, close to the Great Shrine. Wherever he went he carried with him the mark of his forbidden caste--long, tangled and dirty hair. A razor was taboo to him. An osu could not attend an assembly of the free-born, and they, in turn, could not shelter under his roof. He could not take any of the four titles of the clan, and when he died he was buried by his kind in the Evil Forest. How could such a man be

Waache wacheke," alisema Bw Kiaga. "Mungu atawacheka siku ya hukumu. Kwa nini mataifa wanafanya ghasia na kabila za watu kuwaza ubatili? Yeye aketiye mbinguni atacheka. Bwana atawafanyia dhihaka."

"Huelewi," mwongofu alidumisha. "Wewe ni mwalimu wetu, na unaweza kutufundisha mambo ya imani mpya. Lakini hili ni jambo ambalo tunalijua." Naye akamwambia osu ni nini.

Alikuwa mtu aliyewekwa wakfu kwa mungu, jambo lililowekwa kando—mwiko milele, na watoto wake baada yake. Hakuweza kuoa wala kuolewa na waliozaliwa huru. Kwa kweli alikuwa mtu wa kutupwa, akiishi katika eneo maalum la kijiji, karibu na Madhabahu Kubwa. Popote alipokwenda alibeba alama ya tabaka lake lililokatazwa - nywele ndefu, zilizochanika na chafu. Wembe ulikuwa mwiko kwake. Osu hakuweza kuhudhuria kusanyiko la waliozaliwa huru, na wao, kwa upande wao, hawakuweza kujificha chini ya paa lake. Hakuweza kuchukua vyeo vyovyote kati ya vinne vya

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a follower of Christ?

ukoo, na alipofariki alizikwa kwa aina yake katika Msitu Mwovu. Mtu kama huyo angewezaje kuwa mfuasi wa Kristo?

"He needs Christ more than you and I," said Mr. Kiaga.

"Anamhitaji Kristo kuliko mimi na wewe," alisema Bw. Kiaga.

"Then I shall go back to the clan," said the convert. And he went. Mr. Kiaga stood firm, and it was his firmness that saved the young church. The wavering converts drew inspiration and confidence from his unshakable faith. He ordered the outcasts to shave off their long, tangled hair. At first they were afraid they might die.

"Kisha nitarudi kwa ukoo," mwongofu alisema. Naye akaenda. Bwana Kiaga alisimama kidete, na ukakamavu wake ndio uliookoa kanisa hilo changa. Waongofu waliokuwa wakiyumbayumba walipata msukumo na ujasiri kutoka kwa imani yake isiyotikisika. Aliwaamuru waliofukuzwa kunyoa nywele zao ndefu zilizochanika. Mwanzoni waliogopa kwamba wanaweza kufa.

"Unless you shave off the mark of your heathen belief I will not admit you into the church," said Mr. Kiaga. "You fear that you will die. Why should that be? How are you different from other men who shave their hair? The same God created you and them. But they have cast you out like lepers. It is against the will of God, who has promised everlasting life to all who believe in His holy name. The heathen say you will die if you do

"Ila ukinyoa alama ya imani yako ya kipagani sitakuingiza kanisani," alisema Bw Kiaga. "Unaogopa kwamba utakufa. Kwa nini iwe hivyo? Wewe una tofauti gani na wanaume wengine wanaonyoa nywele zao? Mungu huyohuyo alikuumba wewe na wao. Lakini wamewatoa kama wakoma. Ni kinyume na mapenzi ya Mungu. ambaye ameahidi uzima wa milele kwa wote wanaoliamini jina lake takatifu. Wapagani wanasema

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this or that, and you are afraid. They also said I would die if I built my church on this ground. Am I dead? They said I would die if I took care of twins. I am still alive. The heathen speak nothing but falsehood. Only the word of our God is true."

The two outcasts shaved off their hair, and soon they were the strongest adherents of the new faith. And what was more, nearly all the osu in Mbanta followed their example. It was in fact one of them who in his zeal brought the church into serious conflict with the clan a year later by killing the sacred python, the emanation of the god of water.

The royal python was the most revered animal in Mbanta and all the surrounding clans. It was addressed as "Our Father," and was allowed to go wherever it chose, even into people's beds. It ate rats in the house and sometimes swallowed hens' eggs. If a clansman killed a royal python accidentally, he made sacrifices of atonement and performed an expensive burial ceremony such as was done for a great man. No

utakufa ukifanya hiki au kile, na unaogopa. Walisema pia nitakufa nikijenga kanisa langu juu ya ardhi hii. Je, nimekufa. ?Walisema nitakufa nikiwalea mapacha. Mimi bado niko hai. Wapagani hawasemi ila uwongo tu. Neno la Mungu wetu ndilo la kweli."

Wale wawili waliofukuzwa walinyoa nywele zao, na punde wakawa wafuasi wenye nguvu zaidi wa imani hiyo mpya. Na zaidi ya hayo, karibu osu wote huko Mbanta walifuata mfano wao. Kwa kweli alikuwa mmoja wao ambaye kwa bidii yake alileta kanisa katika mzozo mkubwa na ukoo mwaka mmoja baadaye kwa kuua chatu mtakatifu, mtoaji wa mungu wa maji.

Chatu wa kifalme alikuwa mnyama aliyeheshimika zaidi katika Mbanta na koo zote zinazowazunguka. Ilishughulikiwa kama "Baba yetu," na iliruhusiwa kwenda popote ilipochagua, hata kwenye vitanda vya watu. Ilikula panya ndani ya nyumba na wakati mwingine ilimeza mayai ya kuku. Ikiwa mtu wa ukoo aliuwa chatu wa kifalme kwa bahati mbaya, alitoa dhabihu za upatanisho na kufanya sherehe ya mazishi ya gharama

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punishment was prescribed for a man who killed the python knowingly. Nobody thought that such a thing could ever happen.

Perhaps it never did happen. That was the way the clan at first looked at it. No one had actually seen the man do it. The story had arisen among the Christians themselves.

But, all the same, the rulers and elders of Mbanta assembled to decide on their action. Many of them spoke at great length and in fury. The spirit of wars was upon them. Okonkwo, who had begun to play a part in the affairs of his motherland, said that until the abominable gang was chased out of the village with whips there would be no peace.

But there were many others who saw the situation differently, and it was their counsel that prevailed in the end.

"It is not our custom to fight for our gods," said one of them. "Let us not presume to do so now. If a

kubwa kama ilivyofanywa kwa mtu mkuu. Hakuna adhabu iliyowekwa kwa mtu aliyemuua chatu kwa kujua. Hakuna mtu aliyefikiri kwamba jambo kama hilo lingeweza kutokea.

Labda haijawahi kutokea. Hivyo ndivyo ukoo ulivyoitazama kwanza. Hakuna mtu aliyemwona mtu huyo akifanya hivyo. Hadithi hiyo ilikuwa imetokea kati ya Wakristo wenyewe.

Lakini, hata hivyo, watawala na wazee wa Mbanta walikusanyika ili kuamua juu ya hatua yao. Wengi wao walizungumza kwa kirefu na kwa hasira. Roho ya vita ilikuwa juu yao. Okonkwo, ambaye alikuwa ameanza kuhusika katika masuala ya nchi ya mama yake, alisema kuwa hadi genge hilo la kuchukiza litakapofukuzwa kijijini kwa mijeledi hakutakuwa na amani.

Lakini kulikuwa na wengine wengi walioona hali hiyo kwa njia tofauti, na shauri lao ndilo lililoshinda mwishowe.

"Si kawaida yetu kupigania miungu yetu," alisema mmoja wao. "Tusidhanie kufanya hivyo

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man kills the sacred python in the secrecy of his hut, the matter lies between him and the god. We did not see it. If we put ourselves between the god and his victim we may receive blows intended for the offender. When a man blasphemes, what do we do? Do we go and stop his mouth? No. We put our fingers into our ears to stop us hearing. That is a wise action."

"Let us not reason like cowards," said Okonkwo. "If a man comes into my hut and defecates on the floor, what do I do? Do I shut my eyes? No! I take a stick and break his head That is what a man does. These people are daily pouring filth over us, and Okeke says we should pretend not to see."

Okonkwo made a sound full of disgust. This was a womanly clan, he thought. Such a thing could never happen in his fatherland, Umuofia.

"Okonkwo has spoken the truth," said another man. "We should do something. But let us ostracise these men. We would then not be held accountable for their abominations."

Everybody in the assembly spoke,

sasa. Mtu akimwua chatu mtakatifu katika usiri wa kibanda chake, jambo liko kati yake na mungu. Hatukuona. Tukijiweka kati ya mungu na mhasiriwa wake sisi anaweza kupokea mapigo yaliyokusudiwa kwa mkosaji. Mtu anapokufuru, tunafanya nini? Je, tunaenda na kusimamisha mdomo wake? Hapana. Tunaweka vidole kwenye masikio yetu ili kutuzuia kusikia. Hilo ni tendo la busara."

"Tusisababu kama waoga," Okonkwo alisema. "Mwanaume akiingia kwenye kibanda changu na kujisaidia haja kubwa chini nifanye nini? , na Okeke anasema tujifanye hatuoni." Okonkwo alitoa sauti iliyojaa karaha. Huu ulikuwa ukoo wa kike, alifikiria. Jambo kama hilo halingeweza kutokea katika nchi ya baba yake, Umuofia.

"Okonkwo amesema ukweli," alisema mwanaume mwingine. "Tunapaswa kufanya kitu. Lakini tuwatenge watu hawa. Hatutawajibika kwa machukizo yao."

Kila mtu katika kusanyiko

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and in the end it was decided to ostracise the Christians. Okonkwo ground his teeth in disgust.

That night a bellman went through the length and breadth of Mbanta proclaiming that the adherents of the new faith were thenceforth excluded from the life and privileges of the clan.

The Christians had grown in number and were now a small community of men, women and children, self-assured and confident. Mr. Brown, the white missionary, paid regular visits to them. "When I think that it is only eighteen months since the Seed was first sown among you," he said, "I marvel at what the Lord hath wrought."

It was Wednesday in Holy Week and Mr. Kiaga had asked the women to bring red earth and white chalk and water to scrub the church for Easter, and the women had formed themselves into three groups for this purpose. They set out early that morning, some of them with their waterpots to the stream, another group with hoes

alizungumza, na mwishowe ikaamuliwa kuwatenga Wakristo. Okonkwo alisaga meno yake kwa kuchukia.

Usiku huo mpiga kengele alipitia urefu na upana wa Mbanta akitangaza kwamba wafuasi wa imani mpya walikuwa wametengwa na maisha na mapendeleo ya ukoo.

Wakristo walikuwa wameongezeka kwa idadi na sasa walikuwa jumuiya ndogo ya wanaume, wanawake na watoto, wenye kujiamini na kujiamini. Bw. Brown, yule mmishonari mzungu, aliwatembelea kwa ukawaida. "Ninapofikiri kwamba ni miezi kumi na minane tu tangu ile Mbegu ilipopandwa kati yenu," alisema, "nastaajabia alichokifanya Bwana.

Ilikuwa Jumatano katika Wiki Takatifu na Bw. Kiaga alikuwa amewataka wanawake kuleta udongo mwekundu na chaki nyeupe na maji ili kusugua kanisa kwa ajili ya Pasaka, na wanawake hao walikuwa wamejiunda katika makundi matatu kwa ajili hiyo. Waliondoka asubuhi na mapema, baadhi yao wakiwa na mitungi yao

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and baskets to the village earth pit, and the others to the chalk quarry.

Mr. Kiaga was praying in the church when he heard the women talking excitedly. He rounded off his prayer and went to see what it was all about. The women had come to the church with empty waterpots. They said that some young men had chased them away from the stream with whips. Soon after, the women who had gone for red earth returned with empty baskets. Some of them had been heavily whipped. The chalk women also returned to tell a similar story.

"What does it all mean?" asked Mr. Kiaga, who was greatly perplexed.

"The village has outlawed us," said one of the women. "The bellman announced it last night. But it is not our custom to debar anyone from the stream or the quarry."

Another woman said, "They want to ruin us. They will not allow us into the markets. They have said

kuelekea kwenye kijito, kikundi kingine na majembe na vikapu kwenye shimo la udongo la kijiji, na wengine kwenye machimbo ya chaki.

Bwana Kiaga alikuwa akisali kanisani aliposikia wanawake hao wakizungumza kwa furaha. Alimaliza sala yake na kwenda kuona ilikuwa ni nini. Wanawake walikuwa wamekuja kanisani na mitungi tupu. Walisema kwamba baadhi ya vijana waliwafukuza kutoka kwenye mkondo huo kwa mijeledi. Muda mfupi baadaye, wanawake ambao walikuwa wamekwenda kwa udongo nyekundu walirudi na vikapu tupu. Baadhi yao walikuwa wamechapwa viboko vikali. Wanawake wa chaki pia walirudi kusimulia hadithi kama hiyo.

"Yote inamaanisha nini?" aliuliza bwana Kiaga akiwa amechanganyikiwa sana.

"Kijiji kimetuharamishia," alisema mmoja wa wanawake hao. "Mpiga kengele alitangaza jana usiku. Lakini si desturi yetu kumzuia mtu yeyote kutoka kwenye mkondo au machimbo."

Mwanamke mwingine alisema, "Wanataka kutuharibia. Hawataturuhusu kuingia sokoni.

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so."

Mr. Kiaga was going to send into the village for his men-converts when he saw them coming on their own. Of course they had all heard the bellman, but they had never in all their lives heard of women being debarred from the stream.

"Come along," they said to the women. "We will go with you to meet those cowards." Some of them had big sticks and some even machetes.

But Mr. Kiaga restrained them. He wanted first to know why they had been outlawed.

"They say that Okoli killed the sacred python," said one man.

"It is false," said another. "Okoli told me himself that it was false."

Okoli was not there to answer. He had fallen ill on the previous night. Before the day was over he was dead. His death showed that the gods were still able to fight their own battles. The clan saw no reason then for molesting the Christians.

Wamesema hivyo."

Bw. Kiaga alikuwa anaenda kupeleka kijijini kwa waongofu wake alipowaona wakija wenyewe. Bila shaka wote walikuwa wamemsikia mpiga kengele, lakini katika maisha yao yote hawakuwahi kusikia kuhusu wanawake kuzuiwa kutoka kwenye mkondo.

"Njooi pamoja," wakawaambia wanawake. "Tutaenda na wewe kukutana na hao waoga." Baadhi yao walikuwa na fimbo kubwa na wengine hata mapanga.

Lakini Bw. Kiaga aliwazuia.

Alitaka kwanza kujua kwa nini walikuwa wameharamishwa.

"Wanasema Okoli alimuua chatu huyo mtakatifu," mtu mmoja alisema.

"Ni uongo," alisema mwingine.

"Okoli aliniambia mwenyewe kuwa ilikuwa ya uwongo."

Okoli hakuwepo kujibu. Alikuwa ameugua usiku uliopita. Kabla siku haijaisha alikuwa amekufa. Kifo chake kilionyesha kwamba miungu bado inaweza kupigana vita vyao wenyewe. Ukoo huo haukuona sababu ya kuwanyanyasa Wakristo.