RELIGION AS AN INSTRUMENT OF OPPRESSION: A THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF '*ALLAH IS NOT OBLIGED,*' '*THE POOR CHRIST OF BOMBA*' AND '*ARROW OF GOD*

By

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This dissertation by Gladys Kasaro Malupenga, is approved as partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Arts in Literature by the University of Zambia.

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ABSTRACT

Religion is an institution that helps people to find deep meaning of life, identity and feel sense of belonging. Its quests, yearnings, needs are perfectly respectable and they are found rooted in human nature. Religious beliefs have helped human beings to make sense of life's mysteries, moreover, these religious beliefs pervade the values of society.

The study, using the qualitative approach, aims to explore how the religious theme in the selected fiction serve as devices through which the social reality that the author writes about is identified and analysed, and provide deep insight of understanding life. It explores how the characters are shown to be tied to religion psychologically, how the authors represent religion as a human agency that necessitates domination and discusses in depth the impact of religion on the oppressed and the oppressors.

The findings indicate that characters in fictional societies thus in *Allah is not Obliged, The Poor Christ of Bomba* and *Arrow of God* hold the idea of religion in higher esteem. For them, religion provides security, protection and prosperity. However, it has been portrayed as a danger to society on account that it maintains the status quo and justifies the existing of the oppressive society. Characters are oppressed by exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence. The oppressed are made to bear with harsh conditions of life which include poverty and suffering. They are made to accept their circumstances for two reasons, the first one being that of fate and the second one is that of life after death.

Religion affects the characters in many ways such as enslaving them by the same values intended to give meaning to their lives. Everybody embracing such values does not escape the idea of being burdened with religious meaning. Both the oppressor and oppressed have no room to use their minds and this deters personal progression. By reconciling with oppression, the characters cannot change their circumstances and this has hindered them from deep realisation of the depth of existence. They (oppressed and oppressors) are cut off completely from the reality thereby perpetuating the continuity of the illusion world.

The findings from the three texts indicate that religion is used ideologically to comfort characters but in the actual sense it masks the social realities, and deters them from self realisation. The religious teachings alter the minds of characters; they internalise the oppressive religious teachings and become enslaved. Those in privileged positions are play-actors; they use religion to maintain their social standing. The authors unveiled the masks of hypocrisy: they showed how religion creates platforms for deceit, intolerance and violent exploitation. Religion affects a person socially, economically and psychologically. The authors highlight that when used as a tool, religion plays a bigger role in oppressing others in society.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my dear husband and daughter, Monique Niza. You motivate me to work even harder.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE
GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter sets out to look at the subject of oppression in the religious domain. It starts by giving a background to the various roles of religion as they have been analysed by different schools of thought. It further highlights how the roles are manipulated by those holding privileged positions in society, and how religion has turned out to have a negative impact on those who become committed to a religious conviction. It is against this background that it scrutinises thematically the texts of Mongo Beti, Ahmadou Kourouma and Chinua Achebe. This introductory chapter also presents the statement of the problem, the aim, the specific objectives to be investigated and the research questions to be answered.

Next is the theoretical framework that highlights two theories employed by the research, namely psychoanalytic literary theoryoriginating with the work of Sigmund Freud,and Marxist literary theory.The last section of the chapter gives the definitions of terms used which are of direct relevance to the study.

1.2 Background

Religion, in one form or another, has been found in all human societies since human societies first appeared. Archaeological digs have revealed ancient ritual objects, ceremonial burial sites, and other religious artifacts. Religion influences a high proportion of many things. It is important to note that people are not actually clear on what a religion is. There are several key aspects that qualify something to be a religion although the exact details can vary. Pals quotes Durkheim stating that “religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to *sacred things*, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden” (2006:96). He goes on to elaborate that beliefs and

practices unite in a single moral community, called a Church, all those who adhere to them. Others associate religion with places of worship (a temple, synagogue or church), while others associate it with ritual practices (prayer, confession or meditation), and still others associate it with a concept that guides their daily lives like dharma or sin. All this give the idea that religion is a system of beliefs, values, and practices concerning what a person or a community holds to be sacred or considers to be spiritually significant.

However, in reality there is no universal and all-encompassing definition of religion. Marx, Weber and other functional theorists (Pals: 2006) insist that religion is instrumental in soliciting social solidarity and unified actions within the social order. That is, religion binds society together. According to Freud (1961:37) "Religion has clearly performed great services for human civilization. It has contributed much towards the taming of the asocial instincts." It has ruled human society for a long period and the historical outcome does not show any attainment of its purported goal. From this point of view, Karl Marx (Pals: 2006) saw it as a weapon that justifies the existing social structure and provides an opiate for the oppressed. Religion as a social, spiritual and ideological phenomenon exerts great force on human beings. For instance Durkheim, Weber, and Marx, who were reacting to the great social and economic upheavals of the late 19th century and early 20th century in Europe, saw that religion was an integral part of society. For Durkheim, religion was a force for cohesion that helped bind the members of society to the group, while Weber believed religion could be understood as something separate from society. Marx considered religion as inseparable from the economy and the exploitation of the working class. Religion could not be understood apart from its ideological role in perpetuating or mystifying the inequalities of capitalist society. Despite their different views, these social theorists all believed in the centrality of religion to society.

Medieval theology embraced a concept called ‘the divine right of kings’. This basically means that kings were divinely appointed and that whatever the king said came directly from God and should be treated as the decision of God. This was just the manifestation of the tendency of ancient leaders to establish themselves as god-like rulers, just as the Roman emperors did, making citizens bow in worship of them: the emperor was too powerful, and could bring deliverance from foreign aggression, the condition for wealthy and prosperity. In actual fact, history records examples of power-starved governments and individuals using God, gods and religion as a means to justify their thoughtless and self-aggrandising use of political power. Thus religion can be seen as an institution that helps maintain patterns of social inequality. For example, the Vatican has a tremendous amount of wealth, while the average income of Catholic parishioners is meagre. According to this perspective, religion has been used to support the “divine right” of oppressive monarchs and to justify unequal social structures. This is simply another scheme imposed upon the less privileged to keep them obedient to the law of the land, no matter how unfair the law may be to stop them retaliating.

Although in Freud’s terms religion, as it is practised widely by human beings, is captured as a universal obsessional neurosis (Pals: 2006), it plays diverse and divergent roles in the society: it binds society together and at the same time it alters a person’s perception. However, it is vital to note that the values of religion have remained the integral element in the life of human beings since its inception. For thousands of years it has pervaded the social world and has had a dominant influence on a range of human activities, hence has been viewed as an instrument of social control. Brown quotes Tillich postulating thus: "Religion is the state of being grasped by an ultimate concern … a concern that in itself provides the answer to the question of the meaning of our existence.” (1965: 10) It is vital to note that just from its invention, religion enhances

human life and flags up the idea of the Supreme Being. This has put people in constant search of a higher purpose outside themselves, a purpose and a meaning and that is reached through such a search.

In literature, the religious theme has been of great concern to some African writers, the most notable ones being Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Ngugi wa Mirii in their text *I Will Marry When I Want*, (1980), which deals with religious infringements in the neo-colonial East African country of Kenya, while Wole Soyinka in his satirical play *The Trials of Brother Jero*, (1964) dwells much on the abuse of religion by selfish individuals and gullible followers of religious charlatans in post-colonial West Africa. These authors have tried to give an insight into organised religion which has made them strongly denounce some of those who promote it in order to exploit its followers.

Srampickal and Boon (1998:138) contend that religion is an enormously powerful force in all aspects of human life, and, when it is abused, is one of the main tools by which people may be kept in a state of ignorance and disempowerment. The projection of the religious teachings as if they are purely divine masks the reality: people are made to follow these teachings without questioning them. This prevents those who remain truthful to religious conviction from attempting any change. Khan (1995:32) states that "positive religion, in Hegel's view, was the chief hurdle to the liberation of man." This gives the idea that the mystic power in religion alters the people's perception and leads them to accept their earthly predicaments as if these are divinely ordained.

Freud argues that the priests, whose duty was to ensure obedience to religion, met them half-way in this… the priests could only keep the masses submissive to religion by making such large concessions as these to the instinctual nature of man. (1961:37). It is important to note that the

Church's members are blinded from the initial stage; they are held to carry out numerous ritual observances such as repetitive chants, words, songs, prayers and acts of obedience to an earthly leader as a sign of surrendering oneself to a Supernatural Being. The fulfillment of all the ritual practices is what formalises membership by making members adhere strictly to such practices, becoming so preoccupied with the ritual acts of faith, obedience and worship that they conform rigidly to commands laid down and collectively observed by the group. However, these ritual requirements are considered to be perfectly suitable for inventing ideologies, which contributes towards the elusiveness of religion. Wolfreys, Robin and Womack define ideology as "a system of cultural assumptions, or the discursive concatenation of beliefs or values which uphold or oppose the social order" (2000:53). This indicates that religion becomes an ideology when man-made dogma is treated as infallible truth. Kilp asserts that "Correspondingly, the effective function of both religion and ideology relies more on the commitment and loyalty to the group than on the nature of their ideals, norms and goals." (2011:211) This implies that the intended result of religion and ideology may not be for the common good but only for those in privileged positions who issue laws and commands in their own interest.

Though some scholars regarded as religion as instrumental to society, it is easily used as an instrument of oppression by those in privileged positions. In their works, Ahmadou Kourouma, Mongo Beti and Chinua Achebe show how religion warps and destroys the minds of people. It unplugs its adherents from the physical world by deluding them. The charlatans use the mystic power in religion to control and manipulate religious followers. Taking up the various if at times conflicting views of Karl Marx and Marx Weber in the field of the sociology of religion, this study will explore how religion has been used to oppress characters in the three selected texts**.** This will be done by employing Marxist and Psychoanalytic theories.

1.3 Aim of the Study

The aim of the study is to establish whether religion is represented as tool of oppression in the three selected texts.

1.4 Objectives

The objectives of this study are:

1. To establish how the characters are shown to be tied to religion psychologically in the three selected texts.
2. To illustrate how in the three selected texts, religion as a human agency necessitates domination.
3. To examine the effects of religion on both the oppressed and the oppressors in the three selected texts.

1.5 Research Questions

This research is guided by the following questions;

1. How are the characters shown to be tied to religion psychologically in the three selected texts?
2. In what ways do the three selected texts show how religion as a human agency necessitates domination?
3. What are the effects of religion on the oppressed and the oppressors in the three selected texts?

1.6 Statement of the Problem

Literary authors such as Zakes Mda (1990) and Sembene Ousmane (1965) have explored the roles religion has played in the lives of human beings. Their conclusions have reshaped the way we look at the roles of religion. Instead of enhancing the quality of human life, it has been exhibited as diminishing it.(The view that religion historically has been a force for bad rather than good has recently been propagated by Richard Dawkins and others in Europe and the USA.) htt://www.cmf.org.uk'content, A critique of Richard Dawkins' views on Religion. Accessed on 12/11/2018. In line with the aforementioned, the study attempts to explore the role of religion as reflected in the novels of Beti, Kourouma and Achebe. Therefore, this research work seeks to investigate how religion is represented as an instrument of oppression in the three selected texts.

1.7 Significance of the Study

From the available evidence, it is true that many studies have been conducted on religion facilitating the colonialists' entry into Africa. The present study departs from this enquiry to focus on how religion is perceived as a burden imposed on people by false clergy men and women. This study is worth studying because it offers insights into the representation of religion in contemporary African fiction and it will provide the reader with the chance to relate the religious themes in the three selected texts to social reality as well as to other African texts.

1.8 Delimitation of the Study

The scope of this study is to analyse the portrayal of religion in African fiction as an oppressive tool. The choice of the three narratives is based on the cultural settings; the novels depict situations from West African countries: thus two novels from Francophone literature and one from Anglophone literature. Though there are many religions in the world, for the purpose of

reference, this study will concentrate on African Traditional Religion (ATR) and two of the Abrahamic religions namely Christianity and Islam reflected in the three selected primary texts.

1.9 Theoretical Framework

The study will use two literary theories namely Marxist Literary theory and Psychoanalytical literary theory originating with the work of Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud respectively.

Marxism is a social and political theory based on the work of Karl Marx and his followers; it holds the view that society can be understood within its specific history as a series of modes of production that determine the specific social relations of production in which the dynamic force for change is the class struggle. The whole of a person's experience arises out of the social interaction within the given socio-economic context and this is what shapes and develops someone's personal consciousness. Marx was preoccupied with economic factors which he saw as influential in the formation and determination of society. Marx's thought is thoroughly materialistic, and he bases his system on physical reality. The social relations in any period give rise to discursive practices which have no universal validity but are historically dominant ways of controlling and preserving the social relations of exploitation (Selden, Widdowson and Brooker: 2005).

The theory proceeds from the fundamental philosophical assumption that consciousness can never be anything else than conscious existence… consciousness is determined by life (Marx: 568-9). For Marx, all mental systems are the products of social and economic realities. However, Marx "concluded that the economic system is the most fundamental aspect of base of any society" (Booker, 1995: 72). All these other aspects are parts of a class superstructure whose characteristics are at least to some extent dependent on the nature of the base. And to this

superstructure, he ascribes religious beliefs, legal systems and forms of cultural expression such as literature. However, literature is not merely part of the ideological superstructure but is able to stand aside from the other ideologies in the ideological superstructure, to look at them and critique them in literary representations, as is the case with the literary works examined in this dissertation. Marxist theory will thus guide the discussion relating to the role of religion as it is represented in the three specified texts.

Human life requires the satisfaction of basic needs: it is within the economic base that human beings devise the means to satisfy these needs which lead to a division of labour. This division of labour results into classes whose needs and desires are different. "The conflict of social classes establishes the ground upon which ideological conflicts arise" (Selden, Widdowson and Brooker, 2005: 83). The ideologies formed give an upper hand to those who have privileged positions: those in less privileged positions are forced to produce commodities whose end product they do not see.

Marx notes that the division of labour in society results to a separation between individuals who become distanced from each other by way of the differences in their day to day activities (Booker, 1995:73). He argues that working people are alienated from the products of their own labour. The self-alienation of human beings, according to Marx, begins when the products of labour are alienated from the producer:

> If the product of labour is alien to me, if it confronts me as an alien power, to whom, then, does it belong? To a being *other* than myself. Who is this being? The *gods*? To be sure, in the earliest times the principal production (for example, the building of temples, etc., in Egypt, India and Mexico) appears to be in the service of the gods, and the product belongs to the gods. (Marx, 1844, 1959, 2000, 34.)

The beginning of institutional religion coincides with the division of society into classes. Divine and human, sacred and profane ratify the gulf between lord and labourer. Marx also states that

the alienated individual is treated as a source of commodities, eventually leading to the treatment of human beings as economic commodities, valued not for their own individual characteristics but for their economic function. “In short it leads to the commodification of human beings” (Booker, 1995:74). It is against this backdrop that this thesis is analysed in relation to social structures in which discourses are rooted and they play a key role in oppression.

Psychoanalytic theory is the theory of personality organisation and the dynamics of personality development, a clinical method for treating psychopathology. This theory was laid out by Sigmund Freud who later ceased his analysis of the brain and his physiological studies and shifted his focus to the study of the mind and the related psychological attributes making up the mind, and on treatment using free association and the phenomena of transference. McLeod (2016) writes on Freud that he saw the psyche structured into three component parts, a tripartite structure of Id, Ego and Superego, all developing at different stages in our lives. McLeod describes the Id as the primitive and instinctual part of the mind that contains sexual and aggressive drives and hidden memories; the Superego operates as a moral conscience; and the Ego as the realistic part that mediates between the desires of the Id and the Superego. The Id is said to be a collection of all human basic needs, the survival instinct and drives such as hunger, sex, and thirst that need constant expression and fulfilment. The Superego on the other hand is made up of the super conscious: it is an internalised representation of the authority of the father and of society, authority that establishes strict limitations on fulfilment of the unrestricted desires that reside in the Id. It facilitates adherence to the rules and regulations of society. The Ego provides a balancing mechanism between the two. If both the rulers and the subjects acted on all their impulses, they would live in a society characterised by chaos (Booker 1996:29).

Pals (2006: 59) contends that every personality must be rooted in a physical body that is driven by certain basic biological instincts, or drives. These physical impulses preserve both the self and the species, and they both operate on the "pleasure principle" which is true in most of those rulers whose thoughts focus on immediate gratification.

Freud holds that certain wild and destructive tendencies are inherent in human beings. In order to moderate human behaviour, religion and culture come in with moral codes, privation and prohibitions to control and repress basic drives and instincts. However, this repression is applied particularly to influence the behaviour and personality of the masses, those members of the lower orders whose 'anti-social' wishes and desires endanger the process of domination and exploitation. Hence they are made to internalise the Superego.

1.10 Methodology

This research work will employ qualitative methodology, embracing close textual analysis through the application of the two main theories to the texts. To ensure focus, only three works will be investigated, namely '*Allah is Not Obliged,'* (2007) *'The Poor Christ of Bomba*' (1971) and '*Arrow of God'* (1986) by Ahmadou Kourouma, Mongo Beti and Chinua Achebe respectively. Through a close analysis of these texts, data will be collected and analysed by applying the two identified theories in relation to the objectives that have been set out.

1.11 Organisation of the Dissertation

The dissertation is organised into seven chapters. The first chapter is the introduction which comprises General Introduction, Background to the Study, Aim of the Study, Statement of the Problem, Objectives of the Study, Research Questions, Significance of the Study, Theoretical Framework, Methodology, Delimitation, Structure of Dissertation and Definitions of Terms.

Chapter Two is a Literature Review of various critiques of the novel under scrutiny. Chapter Three contains synopses of '*Allah is Not Obliged,' 'The Poor Christ of Bomba*' and '*Arrow of God'*, the three texts under study.

Chapter Four deals with how the characters are shown to be tied to religion psychologically while Chapter Five deals with how the authors represent religion as a human agency that necessitates domination.

Finally, chapter six summarises the findings from the three works, concludes and states my personal response.

1.12 Definition of the Terms Used

- **Culture** – everything that is socially learned and shared by a group of people in a society. It also refers to the way of life.
- **Religion** – a social institution concerned with the ultimate meaning of life and with the answers to questions that are ultimately unanswerable by nature.
- **Alienation**- the feeling of not belonging, which can be physical, cultural or spiritual.
- **Ritual** – ceremonial actions based on religious belief that follows a set pattern in order to appease, enlist aid from, or derive benefits from gods or spirits
- **Exploitation**– relationship in which one side benefits at the other's expense
- **Ideology** – set of concepts or opinions of an individual or group of people
- **Supernatural**– forces beyond the normal world; magical or miraculous
- **Hierarchy**– organisation of a group into higher and lower levels
- **Authoritarian –** relating to strong leadership with unquestioned powers
- **Exploit –** to take advantage of; to make productive use of
- **Islam –** religion based on the teachings of the prophet Muhammad; religious faith of Muslims

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

This chapter reviews religion in West African literature and critical essays on novels by Kourouma, Achebe and Beti. The literature so far reviewed on Kourouma's, Achebe's and Beti's works does not present religion as the main theme neither does it look at the impact of religion on society as a whole.

This review also looks at the works of the three authors in the literary world and the record indicates that these three authors are great writers. However, Achebe is ranked first in the African literary canon: "his reputation has retained a remarkably steady place in the canon through a whole generation, covering the last half of the twentieth century," as Izevbaye (2010:31) aptly puts it. Just like Achebe, Kourouma "was a leading figure of modern African literature." (Adesokan, 2012: 11), while Makokha (2011:21) classifies Achebe and Kourouma as "canonical writers." It is for this reason that there are more critical essays on these two authors than on Beti whose writing seems to be biting satires though they are among the best African novels.

2.2. Literature Review

Religion is one of the major instruments that have been used for social control in societies from time immemorial. Marx, Weber and other functional theorists (Pals: 2006) insist that religion is instrumental in soliciting social solidarity and unified actions that bind the society together. It does so by instilling acceptable morals and values that add meaning to the life of individuals. It can also be looked upon as a system of faith and worship, which provides adherents with meaning and purpose in their lives: it helps them to realize the importance of their

existence. It is for this reason that some contemporary fiction writers feature religion in their works, and Kourouma, Achebe and Beti are no exceptions. These authors address the influence of religion on Africa in their writing.

Izevbaye (2009) for example, reviews *Arrow of God* and notes that Achebe's central character, Ezeulu epitomises ancestral worshiping, and he embodies Umuaro's most important religious and political mores. This implies that he is central to the life of Umuaro. Izevbaye further notes that:

> By its social charter, the economic and religious fate of Umuaro is so closely tied to the religious and political choices of its leader that, in the normal order of things, the community depends on the priest for its activities. (36)

This society lives by the dictates of religion and its members cannot do anything outside what is considered religious conviction. It is only Ezeulu who has the power to name the seasons. The questions are: what has made Umuaro to depend on one person for its activities? Does Umuaro see things in the right perception? These are some of the questions that my discussion is addressing.

Izevbaye also tries to look at the role of the chief priest which is to "go ahead and confront danger before it reached his people" (Achebe, 1961:189). To him, Ezeulu "is essentially an incarnation of his function as scapegoat, and after his ordination as Ezeulu "Priest [of] Ulu", even his natal name is discarded or forgotten (36).From this it is clear that Ezeulu's separation from his family begins the moment he is chosen as the priest of Ulu. His identity is altered and he is expected to discharge his duties as per his new identity. My thesis is also concerned with this idea of religion isolating certain figures from the rest of society. Izevbaye further notes that:

> the scapegoat theme was widespread in West African writing during the period of the publication of *Arrow of God.* Its recurrence was probably due to its contemporary significance as a continuation of an indigenous concept that was

> reinforced by the ascendance of the two world religions whose creed centred on the sacrifice of a surrogate for the sins of individuals. (37)

The idea put forward here is that the scapegoat ritual is deeply rooted in the old traditions of performing sacrifices to atone for the sins of the community. In literary terms it marked a cultural transition from earlier rites. In *Arrow of God*, such rites are recalled at the moment of crisis like when Ezeulu appears to resist the humane function for which he is initiated. Izevbaye points out that it is at this moment when Nnayelugo reaches for a last-resort solution to Ezeulu's intransigence: "Every offence has its sacrifice, from a few cowries to a cow or a human being." (Achebe, 1961: 209) Umuaro's readinesses to go to this extent just to placate the deity shows how closely tied people are to religious beliefs. On the other hand the questions may arise, if Ezeulu is the embodiment of Umuaro, why does he resist the most salient function he is called for? Is he really called to serve the interest of Umuaro? What is the impact of Ezeulu's action on Umuaro?

From his critique, Izevbaye asserts that the rite of sacrifice is essentially a drama. However, in this case it appears in the new genre which is novelistic narrative:

> the history of the scapegoat ritual performed in *Arrow of God* is relatively recent compared with its antecedents. Although there is an aura of antiquity in Ulu's shrine, with its 'skulls of all past chief priests', there is still a communal consciousness of the newness of the new dispensation not only as the basis of Nwaka's challenge to the authority of Ulu, but also because the inauguration of the ritual with the investiture of Ezeulu as the first scapegoat priest is recalled as if it occurred within living memory in Umuaro. (38)

The scapegoat ritual in *Arrow of God* is portrayed as a contemporary act; however, it does not escape the idea of a barbaric act. Therefore, Ezeulu's preference as a chief priest is a sacrifice made by Umuaro. He is expected to submit himself wholly to the dictates of religion. Izevbaye's view of Ezeulu as a scapegoat supports my discussion of how religion is used as a tool to repress people.

For Killam (1969), *Arrow of God* deals with "the nature and quality of Igbo village life as a consideration in their own right," (59). He points out how Achebe elaborates the Igbo life dating back to a time when ancestral worship was highly valued. Killam says that "at the centre of the novel is Ezeulu, chief priest of Ulu, a god created at the time when the six villages banded together for protection against slave raids to supersede older village deities." (60) It is the very power of this socially-created god that Achebe tries to explore in the novel. He addresses the question of who decides what shall be the wish of the gods.

Initially, Ezeulu's power is supreme in the sense that he could not point out the difference between himself as a priest and Ulu as a God as Agrawal (2015:52) aptly puts it. Though he knows that he is just an arrow in the bow of God, he craves for power and authority which are being shaken because of the new religion, Christianity as well as his deviation in his own cultural past, but he still needs to be protected from outside pressures which threaten to undermine him. This shows that there is a basic conflict in the story and this is what Achebe foregrounds. However, Killam argues that "Ezeulu is compelled to defend his unique position of priest of Ulu, the most powerful of the village deities against, on one hand, reactionary forces within the tribe and, on the other, against European culture, religion" (61). Ezeulu's thirst for power begins from the moment he is taken and raised from his low status. In his efforts to defend his power, Ezeulu is portrayed as someone who is in conflict with himself.

In her review, Innes (1990) also addresses the issue of power, stating that the white man`s power is not yet adequate reason for conversion to his god, but it provides a pragmatic reason for acting prudently. Just like Killam, Innes says that Ezeulu is surrounded by a whole web of conflicts and rivalries: there are disputes in his family. There is also rivalry between Nwaka and Ezeulu, and between Ezidemili and Ezeulu. In short she states:

> *Arrow of God* is 'about' the problem of authority and the related questions of whom or what to believe and follow; and if …the author is unwilling to commit himself finally on the precise relationship between inner and outer, it is because Achebe wishes to leave the reader involved in the problem of 'knowing.'(73)

For instance whenever Ezeulu thinks of the immensity of his power over the year and the crops and his people, he questions if it is real. It is true that he names the day for the feast of the pumpkin leaves or for the New Yam feast; but he does not choose it.

Innes tries to show Ezeulu`s priestly role and character, and the forces that limit and contest his power: "the forces of nature, the moon and rains which obscure the moon, and also the internal ravages of nature – his failing sight, his growing age, and his unwillingness to acknowledge" (74). Ezeulu is in conflict with both religion and social reality. He represses his thoughts and lives in an illusory world. This is evidenced in his delight in making young men wince from the power of his gri Ezeulu records the months and the seasons, but in turn the months and the seasons gradually rob him of his strength and his sight (74). Does Ezeulu as the chief priest of Ulu exhibit any sign of the self? Why can't he be true to himself?

Innes argues that the responsibility to name what is, to confirm what, in effect, the community should know, does not extend to the power to name what will be; "no one would be so rash as to say openly that Ulu would do this or do that" (Achebe, 1961:4). This reminds a reader of the limitations of power and knowledge Ezeulu has. Innes affirms that although Edogo suspects that in sending Oduche to the Christians, Ezeulu is attempting to influence the choice of his successor, we are reminded here and at the end of the book of "the inability of humans to control the future" (74). Edogo's suspicion is not right, his reasoning is based on how Ezeulu presents himself as omniscient and omnipotent; however, Edogo does not realize that it is this power that Ezeulu lacks. What has influenced Edogo's reasoning? Is he able to view things from a different angle?

The same chapter also records the power of languages to create. Innes for instance notes the very power in the story of the creation of Ulu as it is told in mythical form during the Festival of the pumpkin leaves. Ulu is the people's creation. However, the status of gods created by men and the authority their priests can have are the questions that haunt Ezeulu. Can these gods made by human labour stand the test of time? How do these deities relate to human beings?

Innes further writes that Ezeulu`s duty as carrier of the communal spirit, both as leader and scapegoat, is the role emphasized in the festival of the pumpkin leaves (78). However, the whole procession of this festival shows that Ezeulu has no right over his life, he confronts danger even when he knows that it is not safe.

Innes further argues that the mythical journey related during the festival of the pumpkin leaves forms a counterpoint to the journey that Ezeulu makes towards the end of novel as he returns from Okperi. He travels almost alone, the rain that drenches him serves not to purify and cleanse Ezeulu and Umuaro of their transgression but rather soak them in it (78). The soaking foreshadows the end of Ezeulu's religion, but Ezeulu takes it as a reason for revenge. The intention of Ezeulu indicates that his role as a carrier is reversed because, "he piles on transgressions and grievances to bring to his community, and it is his personal and individual pride that he seeks to avenge" (79).This translates into both Ezeulu and Ulu losing their primary role and meaning.

Man`s necessary attempt to control his own fate is often defeated by forces outside his control, by change, by nature and by events and peoples of which he can have no knowledge (81). Innes writes that *Arrow of God* tells the story of a priest, Ezeulu, who declines an appointment as warrant chief. He is imprisoned for several weeks and fails to perform one of his cardinal duties, to announce the appearance of the new moon in his village.

> As a result the feast of the new yam is delayed, the villagers suffer from hunger as their old supplies of yam run out, and some begin to turn to the harvest festival of the Christian god as an alternative. (64)

This is actually a result of Ezeulu's obstinacy. At this point he is not able to think rationally as his focus is to punish Umuaro. Innes indicates that the community is not an abstract thing, "as Ugoye`s individual prayer and concern about Oduche's defilement of the python reminds us, the community is greater than each individual, and it is perhaps this that Ulu represents, the spirit of the community" (76). At the end of the story, the community flees to the Christian God for immunity from Ulu's wrath and Ezeulu is isolated in his madness following the death of his favorite son.

Innes also records that *Arrow of God* is set in the second decade of the 20th century. The colonial powers are provided with a whole group of mission-educated Igbos who see the white man`s civilization as the wave of the future. Innes shows that the end of the native religion has been overshadowed by the terrible destruction of Abame by British forces, and it is clearly a devastating power, not the glory or the richness of European culture which converts Moses (69).

In a related development, Mordaunt (2015) writes on how Achebe deals with the problem of personal conflict in *Arrow of God*: "Ezeulu comes into conflict with himself in a quest to hold on to power despite his age and the breakthrough of the British colonial administrators" (153). His obsession with power makes him act to achieve his goal; however, he demonstrates to Umuaro that he is loyal to Ulu. His loyalty to Ulu the deity, however, is just meant to blindfold his people and in most cases his decisions backfire. For instance "Ezeulu sends his son to the white man`s missionary school where the boy adopts the new religion and sacrileges his own" (153). All this adds up to the pending destruction of the native religion. Umuaro's beliefs will be displaced just as Udoche's mindset is altered. Mordaunt argues that the novel is not so much

concerned with the society as with Ezeulu himself. For Mordaunt, "there does seem to be a preponderance of the village life, but this is the setting in which the central figure expresses his character. "Ezeulu and his culture are one" (1989:154). In interpreting to Umuaro the will of the god, Ezeulu performs "the two most significant rituals in the life of the people – the festival of the pumpkin leaves and the New Yam. Ezeulu, the intermediary, is half black and half white, thus bridging the spirit and the human world" (154).

It is imperative to note that the novel opens with Ezeulu brooding over his eyesight "and that someday he would have to rely on someone else`s eyes as his grandfather had done when his sight failed" (154). This thought establishes the tone for the novel and unveils Ezeulu`s internal conflict. The impending blindness is a threat to his authority; it will interfere with his cardinal function of ordering seasons, and at the same time lose his tribal influence. He represses this thought by imagining that he is fit. This act entails his desire to maintain a perpetual authority over his tribe.

Just as Innes records man's inability to control the forces of nature, Mordaunt also acknowledges that Ezeulu is aware of the supernatural forces whose ways nobody can understand, and this makes him helpless. Ezeulu is busy looking for ways to remain in total control in the traditional setup; however, he is intrigued by the power of the white man, the use of firearms to bring to a halt the civil war between Umuaro and Okperi. Ezeulu's vision of the white man`s power makes him send his son Oduche to the white man`s religion. "He has ulterior motives for sending his son to the mission school; it is really for personal *gain*, not for the good of the society of which he is a part" (156). He is at this point not aware of or does not even foresee any repercussion in making a decision contrary to the sanction of his people. In this way, he puts one foot in the new culture (156).

Mordaunt says that the purpose for sending his son to join the missionaries is to be his 'eye' there. If there is 'nothing in it,' Oduche will return; if on the other hand, 'there is something there,' Oduche will bring home his [Ezeulu's] share" (Achebe, 1961:50)

Though Agrawal also echoes that Ezeulu sends Oduche to the Christian religion to be his eye, he shows it as "a flaw in Ezeulu's character how he wanted to maintain his dignified stature of the Chief Priest by sending one of his sons to attend Christian school" (2015:54). This act conflicts with his initial fear of depending on someone for information. Using Oduche`s eyes does not guarantee Ezeulu the right perception of things. Oduche`s mother is displeased at this act and tries to reason with Ezeulu who remains adamant.

Mordaunt also states that Achebe is showing "that Ezeulu has become marginal in propounding ideals completely at variance with his culture`s norms, necessitated by the predicament in which he finds himself" (157). However, Ezeulu`s plan backfires at the moment when Oduche commits sacrilege: the imprisoning of the sacred python. According to Mordaunt, Ezeulu "is intensely disturbed, as this confirms the potency of the white man`s religion since it enters the boy`s head and heart" (158). The struggle of the caged python indicates the internal turmoil that Ezeulu is experiencing.

Mordaunt further observes that what Achebe accomplishes is the delineation of a character whose apparent craftiness has relegated him to a situation where he is living an inauthentic life, in alienation with himself, and therefore, estranged to the community to which he belongs and even to the god whose will he pretends to know (159). This informs how Ezeulu has shaped his own world and he finally becomes disillusioned. The refusal to eat the holy yam marks the climax of Ezeulu`s conflicts: "thus bringing his vengeance upon all his people; even the innocent, those who are helpless, have to suffer" (158-159). The tragedy of Umuaro is

reflected in the tragedy of Ezeulu as he is the embodiment and custodian of Umuaro's tradition. The quest for power makes Ezeulu not understand his primary role as a chief priest. He becomes obsessed with the idea of holding on to power, and as a result he is in conflict with himself. Amuta (1996:405) asserts that for Ezeulu "consequently, his psyche becomes the battleground for the reconciliation of the two conflicting value systems and their supporting institutions." When the values conflict, they become problematic and therefore the basis for a deeper dislocation.

Turning to *The Poor Christ of Bomba*, S. Mutunda (2009) focuses on the image of women that appears in most African men's novels, that of the prostitute. He observes that Beti "satirically exposes some Catholic missionary practices in colonial Cameroon" (52). Mutunda further notes that the misery, exploitation and oppression of the young women kept in the Sixa house. At the centre of the story is Father Drumont, the overseer of the Church who claims to have built this convent in order to prepare young women for their future roles as mothers and wives. They are forced to work in construction and to do domestic chores without pay. He cites Gerald Moore who describes their ordeal in the following terms:

> Raphael, the catechist-doctor of the Sixa, has been systematically debauching the girls in his charge and infecting them with syphilis, the girls are cruelly overworked and constantly intimidated by the catechist Raphael also offers these young women as prostitutes to his friends. The women give in to avoid hard labor. (53)

Thus the women are not only innocent victims but also 'scapegoats' who are held responsible for the moral degradation in the Sixa.

Just like Mutunda, Sani (2015) looks at how women are portrayed as doubly oppressed in Beti's novel. He argues that women in the novel's settings are being oppressed and unjustly maltreated by Father Drumont, and by the native African culture. The analysis concerns itself with "pretence, hypocrisy, insincerity and biasness of the Christian mission in respect to women

issues such as polygamy, adultery and other sundry issues" (89). Drumont has just made the lives of the women miserable possibly due to his inability to see things from a wider perspective. *The Neff Review* (2010) also notes that "From the outset, Drumont is unsympathetic to them. During Mass he drags a woman to the altar and forces her to kneel in penance; the narrator has no idea what she has done." To Sani, the appearance of the Church at Bomba merely fuels the repression of women. Even Denis the narrator is able to conceptualise the bias among his people. He

> criticizes the native tradition which gives the male gender more preference than the female gender. He bears his dismay over his father's remark, who is a catechist, that he would wish his daughter to have a baby outside wedlock: "After all, my father is a catechist, yet I'm certain he'd be the happiest of men if my sister Anne had a baby before marriage, especially a son. That will be one man more in the household. The only thing is, my father might be excommunicated by Father Drumont over a thing like that, especially as he's a catechist. (Beti, 1971: 9).

It is obvious Denis is not in accord with the traditional concept of preferring a son to a daughter though he becomes aware of these ideas through his father. What has made Denis think differently from the natives? Is he able to actualise his thoughts? These are the questions my thesis attempts to discuss. However, Sani highlights how Beti shows the flaws of the native traditional religion, and on the other hand he also tries to show that even father Drumont holds the same view about women, and this implies that Denis will not be exceptional.

The Neff Review (2010) also describes Drumont as "a rigid moralist, a self-righteous minor despot, and a criminally negligent administrator. He knows something is terribly wrong, and he feels tired and confused and guilty." His actions indicate the full expression of the Superego, and this results in one not being mentally healthy. In Sani's view, father Drumont lacks personal concern for the plight of the women as illustrated in the manner he deals with polygamy and its consequences. For instance, when he meets a woman who often visits her daughter who is married to a polygamous husband, Drumont's judgment is simple but rigid,

because he tells the woman that "Give up these visits to your daughter!" (62). Sani (2015: 90) further points out that Drumont's response to the woman to "end all relations with her daughter who would be married to a polygamist" illustrates that he does not perceive anything beyond his dogma. The questions that need to be addressed are: does Drumont's dogma add any value to the characters' lives? Why does he emphasise so much on adhering to dogmatic teachings? Why can't the characters act according to what they think is right?

In his analysis, Sani also notes the objectification of wives and women in relation to money. As much as father Drumont discourages polygamy, the husbands of the women whom he has sent to the Sixa marry second wives immediately. The puzzle here is that the mission "derives financial gains when these men marry second wives because their children pay higher dues to the Church before they are baptised than those from non-polygamous homes" (91).

Sani also observes that the idea of the Sixa house is another indicator of perpetrating the oppression and abuse of women. He writes that the Sixa works for the material interest of the Church as it provides free labour. Just as Mutunda states, Sani also echoes that the women are exploited by the native men who are in charge of the Sixa. In short, he reveals that women in *The Poor Christ of Bomba* are oppressed both by culture and by religion.

Tita (2016) tries to show how Beti's *The Poor Christ of Bomba* "stands on the foundations of the slave narrators in its portraiture of imperialism and in setting the stage for decolonization in colonial Cameroon" (185). However, the story revolves around Father Superior Drumont, a Catholic priest who has established his mission at Bomba, a parish in the rainforest region of southern Cameroon. For Malaba (1998:197) "Fr. Drumont is quite unchrist like: he despises children, is a misogynist, and is largely insensitive to the plight of the blacks who are labouring under the yoke of colonialism." For Tita, Drumont presents himself as a 'messenger'

of Jesus Christ destined to spread the gospel to his parishioners whom he does not understand. His perception seems to be heavily influenced by the French imperialists' indoctrination. Is Drumont really lacking foresight? What is he up to?

Drumont's mode of proselytization reveals his clear intention to the reader: he forcefully converts natives to Christianity through fear and intimidation. Tita writes that Beti portrays Denis as the only success of Drumont's missionary work. "Denis has become a devout Christian who feeds on every word that proceeds from the mouth of Father Superior Drumont" (186). This change draws Denis closer to father Drumont than to his own father. However, their relationship is based on the chores that the boy performs for Drumont. This implicitly points to how the boy is exploited as a drudge. Tita notes that Drumont's "only interest is in turning his parishioners away from their native traditions, converting them to Christianity, and collecting all kinds of membership dues for his church coffers" (187). On the other hand, the natives acknowledge joining religion in order to acquire material benefits.

Turning to *Allah Is Not Obliged*, Adhikari (2015:23) writes that "Kourouma brings about an intersection of the authoritarian discourse on Allah with the child perspective of the narrator and the Christian ideology." Birahima the narrator is constantly provoked by the ideological and religious discourses of his society. This, following Adhikari, is what constitutes the focus of my discussion. Birahima reacts to these discourses, talking all the while to resolve their inherent contradictions, and it is their intersection in his consciousness that makes his speech dialogic (18). Does he manage to resolve the contradictions? What strategies does he use to solve the contradictions?

Adhikari says "These discourses remain in Birahima's consciousness as isolated "authoritarian" discourses on Allah, beyond any questioning. One of the tenets of the Muslim

faith proclaimed that Allah's 'ultimate judgment' prevailed and that all humans were at his mercy" (19). How is Birahima influenced by these discourses on Allah?

For Adhikari, Birahima enters into dialogue with the authoritative voice of religion, and the title he gives to his story "Allah is not obliged to be fair about all the things he does here on earth" is dialogically constructed and contains his reaction to Islam in the form of a negation to the Muslim faith that everything is in keeping with Allah's will (20).

Religion is the central concern of Darkoh (2013) in his analysis of *Allah Is Not Obliged*. What he does is investigate how Islam is represented. He establishes that Kourouma's attitude to Islam is negative, at least in terms of its adherents: "Kourouma paints a gloomy picture of Islam when he situates his Muslim characters in the war-torn zone probably as a testing ground to see how Islam, represented by the Muslim characters, responds to it. Supposedly holy Muslim characters who should paint a good image of Islam are often found either using Islam itself as a vehicle to amass wealth or contravening the rules of the religion to do likewise" (43). Why are these Muslim characters manipulative?

Kourouma, says Darkoh, shows that the Muslim characters' love for money is greater than their love for Allah. For instance, he shows this idea through the character of Yacouba whom he has given many roles and only reacts positively to those that indicate financial possibilities. "Only on a few occasions when he wants his Islamic identity to show, depending on the circumstances, does he refer to himself as a powerful Muslim grigriman" (44). Darkoh affirms that Kourouma's mockery of Yacouba is one of the ways in which Kourouma negatively represents Islam itself.

In a different vein, Nabutanyi (2013) writes that Kourouma's *Allah is Not Obliged* uses an insulated child narrator who is covered with well-constructed masks of bravado to chronicle war atrocities that he is incapable of confronting. Nabutanyi goes on to elaborate that

> The masks behind which Birahima writes about the horrors of war are constructed in part by the tone of black humour that pervades his story; a humour perhaps best captured by the novel's title. The Qur'anic phrase, 'Allah is not obliged to be fair about all the things he does here on earth' (*Allah* 1) is not only periodically repeated in the novel, but it acts as an overarching philosophy of the novel (63).

The phrase opens and closes the novel, gesturing at either end the need to laugh at, or attribute the painful realities of war to the mysteries of God. To strengthen his critique, Nabutanyi quotes Richard Priebe who argues in a similar vein that "Birahima uses this Qur'anic extract as a mantra-like response to all his horrific experiences" (2013:65). The constant use of the phrase makes Birahima reconcile the Islamic faith with events or episodes that are unimaginably horrific. Does this mental and psychological reconciliation in any way alter Birahima's situation for the better? Why can't he act on his will, independently? This is what my discussion will focus on.

Kabale (2011) adds to the discussion stating that from the beginning, the revealing title of Kourouma's '*Allah n'est pas obligé'*, informs how Allah, the most powerful God as the Muslims confess, does not act under any external pressure (36). He is not obliged to be right to all his creation. The child soldier Birahima and his fellow characters are aware that Allah indeed is the master of his own will, he has determined their fate. With this knowledge, they believe in Allah and pray five times per day. However, when things go beyond what they can handle, they resort to the pagan intervention of their ancestral spirits by consulting marabouts, the wizards and the *féticheurs*.

Kabale (2011) says that it is in awe of the marabouts that Yacouba picks up the alias maker of amulets. The irony of destiny occurs when neither Allah, nor the African spirits manage to solve the problems of their religious admirers (37). At times even the marabout cannot provide solutions, for instance the mother of Birahima, an enthusiastic Muslim woman, suffers from the terrible fate launched against her right leg by an evil-eyed one. It is rationalised if not justified when she dies that "Allah killed her by use of ulcer and the tears she shed so much in her life because Allah, he of the sky does his own will; he is not obliged to do always all that is right" (Kourouma, 2007: 32). Likewise against all the evidence the child soldiers who appear in the novel are convinced that their fetishes bearing inscriptions from the Koran will protect them from their enemy in combat. Darkoh quotes Nelly Lecomte, Dana Rufolo and Marie-France Bauvir stating that "*Allah Is Not obliged*…is set within the context of conflict with Islam. Magic which derives from animistic thought is being used unscrupulously by men who are willing to exploit the ancient beliefs of their people" (2013:34). The characters have a mental fixation on the objects fabricated by these *féticheurs*. They are totally convinced that these amulets will provide the needed protection in a horrible war zone. The reader is made to realise that in spite of all evidence to the contrary, the characters continue to believe in the magic power of fetishes, charms and amulets even when powerful men succumb. Why is it impossible for these characters to step out of the mental and ideological straitjacket that binds them to religious loyalties?

Kyoore concerns himself with the discursive strategy Kourouma employs in "transcoding" historical events in a literary code. He lists the constant evocation of Allah as one of the narrative devices; this has been used as one does in an oral narrative prayer. Kyoore writes that "the evocation of Allah as a narrative device emphasizes the thematic importance of religion" (200: 13). Kourouma makes fun of the hypocritical practitioners of African Traditional

Religion, Christianity and Islam. For instance, he writes that sex becomes a metaphor for the atrocities caused by the civil wars. Mother Superior who has been projected as a saint makes love profusely with Prince Johnson (one of the historical characters in the novel) who is filled with lordly principles. This act is a metaphor that depicts the spiritual and moral depravity of Johnson, and by extension, all the corrupt African politicians (13). Though he raises a point that is of thematic importance for our discussion of the effects of religious ideology, Kyoore does not dwell much on the subject. If the religious theme is of great importance, how does the author portray it? And why in particular does Johnson mask himself in lordly religious principles.

2.3. Conclusion

To conclude this overview of critical literature on the three novels, it is clear that the issues of power, politics and religion are closely interrelated. Critics focus on how authors address the issues of power in their works, for instance Achebe's focus on power, politics and religion in *Arrow of God*, whose main character Ezeulu the chief priest is obsessed with power. Other critics analyse how authors represent religion, for example Kourouma is said to represent the Muslim religion very negatively, for instance in repeatedly showing how Allah, the most powerful God as the Muslims confess, does not act under any external pressure, while Beti concentrates on how the colonialists use religion to achieve their objective as capitalists in Africa. However, little attention has been paid by the critics to religion itself, though it acts as a catalyst in achieving the colonialists' and materialists' objectives. Owing to this, my work seeks to fill the gap and adds to other discussions. It acknowledges that religion is an important theme in these texts and analyses how their authors engage with it, depicting situations in which the depth and pervasiveness of religious belief in African society is revealed and unmasked.

CHAPTER THREE

TEXT SYNOPSES

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a short synopsis of the texts under investigation. The texts are Ahmadou Kourouma's *Allah Is Not Obliged* (2007), Mongo Beti's *The Poor Christ of Bomba* (1971) and Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God* (1986). The chapter ends with a conclusion.

3.1. Synopses of the texts

3.2.1 *Allah is not Obliged*

Ahmadou Kourouma's *Allah is not Obliged* was first published in 2000 by Editions du seuil in France under the title *Allah n'est pas obligé*. The text analysed in this study is a 2007 edition translated by Frank Wynne. Most of the setting of the story is post-colonial after the emergence of the middle class in West Africa. The story is set in Liberia and Sierra Leone during the period of their civil wars amid strife and anarchy from 1986 to 1996. The war-wrecked setting finds in it a child soldier who tells the experiences he undergoes from one encounter to another with warlord, rival warlord, diamond smuggler and grigrimen (juju men). The story is told by Birahima, the main character, who comes from an Islamic Malinke family. His mother, a devout Muslim, is in agony for most of her life. "Her left leg was as withered as a shepherd's crook and her right leg … was amputated and crippled by the ulcer" (6). After the death of his mother, Birahima comes under the custody of Balla the animist. However, by the Muslim Malinke elders' standards, Balla does not qualify for the guardianship role because they fear that he might be a bad influence on the young Muslim. The grandmother suggests that the boy should go and stay with his aunt so that he can be provided with a good Islamic education. Yacouba, who is a devout Muslim and a native fetishist, has just appeared under a new identity and is

preferred by the Muslim Malinke elders as they are sure that he will impart the Muslim values to the protagonist Birahima. Yacouba does not hesitate to accept the offer as it seems to be for him a profit-making venture. Moreover, he has already heard that the marabouts and juju men are making a lot of money in the war zone.

Hoping for a better life, Birahima, under the guardianship of El hajj Yacouba embarks on a search for his aunt Mahan who is believed to be in Liberia. They encounter so many obstacles on their way and El hajj Yacouba uses his traditional and Islamic knowledge to ward off the spirits though they persist in appearing in different forms. Birahima is taught the meanings of the signs that they encounter and the disappearing of the very signs is interpreted as an assurance of protection by the ancestral spirits. Birahima is brainwashed by the mystic power attached to Yacouba's juju.

Birahima's journey in search of safety lands him in a world where war is the order of the day. Amidst these violent conflicts, Kourouma depicts a situation where everybody is engrossed in killing. Boys, girls, women, men, politicians, warlords, Muslims and Christians all kill. Birahima has just to find a way of surviving. He decides to confront the struggles, ironically not with the religious mystic power and promise that Islam should offer, but with the supreme symbol of violent power –the AK 47. His perception of the world now changes from street kid to child soldier who is expected to kill in order to survive. However, not for a single moment does Yacouba identify himself as a devoted El hajj, he clearly shows a *féticheur* identity in presenting himself as a marabout and juju man. For Yacouba, this situation serves as an opportunity to amass wealth by foul means, contrary to the Malinke Muslim family's expectation that Yacouba remains a faithful Muslim guardian. There is no single moment recorded when Birahima, under

the guardianship of Yacouba is taught to say the Muslim prayers. Rather Yacouba teaches him his own hypocritical and dishonest behaviour.

The war situation depicted by Kourouma is caused by the political tyrants of the times such as Houphouet Boigny, Muamar Al Quathafi, Blaise Compaore, Samuel Doe, Charles Taylor, Prince Johnson, El Hajj Koroma, Foday Sankoh and others. All these historical leaders are portrayed in their power-hungry mode. They are the epitome of capitalist greed with small warlords working under them. Just as they step into the war zone, Birahima and Yacouba are taken in by the warlord known as Colonel Papa le Bon, the warlord working under Taylor "who wreaks havoc all over the region" (48). Papa le Bon is believed to have been trained as a priest, and when he was supposed to be ordained as a priest he found himself amidst war. He is a charlatan who carries a Bible in his left hand and a Qur'an in the other, he is inseparable from his AK-47 and is also a user of charms and fetishes. He is accorded the respect of a religious man but there is a savage beast behind the religious mask.

As their search proceeds Birahima and Yacouba land in the hands of Prince Johnson, a Church man who is portrayed as a warlord with his head stuffed full of incredible lordly principles. The funniest thing is putting his principles into practice. However, he is a ruthless man who claims that he is involved in tribal wars at God's command (139). He also sends the child soldiers to the battle front who bring back to him contraband in which they have no share. From Prince Johnson, Birahima comes into contact with Sister Hadja Gabrielle Aminata whom he describes as being "…one-third Muslim, one-third Catholic and one-third animist" (180). She tells the outside world that she is defending the virginity of the girls she is keeping. The truth of the matter is that she is busy subjecting the girls to inhuman conditions like genital mutilation, making them child-soldiers and killing those she believes are misbehaving. She does the killing

using the AK-47 that she is always armed with. From the narrator's viewpoint the acts of Sister Aminata are disgusting.

Most of the warlords Birahima comes into contact with display the characteristics of staunch religious men and women, who profess their faith in the existence of the Supreme Being. But they are all killing just like thugs and this makes Birahima change his perception of the universe. He is psychologically affected and questions the reliability of religion. The death of Papa le Bon who is gunned down even with all his grigris (77) is compared with Tête Brûlée's defeat using the same grigris (118). The narrator confirms that "I didn't understand this fucking universe…Was this grigris bullshit true or not true?" (118). His hopes for a meaningful life are all shattered even though he has been placed in the safe hands of his Muslim uncle and guardian, Yacouba.

As the search continues, Birahima reunites with his two cousins namely Saydou, who has lived a cursed life, and Mamadou the Doctor. Mamadou asked Saydou the bandit to go into the Liberian jungle to rescue their mother (Birahima's aunt). In Worosso, Yacouba, Saydou and Birahima are incorporated into El Hadji Koroma's army. It is at this place that they discover that Aunt Mahan was tracked down and possibly arrived at the camp ill. The trio are told that she died after some days as she also observed the rules of the Malinke boycott: "Yacouba said prayers and said that Allah hadn't wanted me to see my aunt; may Allah's will be done on earth as it is in heaven." (211). The two boys cried but to his surprise, Birahima learns that it is the money Saydou is crying for, not Mahan. The child soldier's effort to unite with his aunt Mahan proves futile: he only sees the dead body of his aunt as the story ends. Finally, Birahima, Sekou and Yacouba join Doctor Mamadou on the journey to Abidjan. Sekou's and Yacouba's folds of their trousers are heavy with purses full of gold and diamonds; in addition, the doctor has also

promised to help them have their identities changed so as to openly practise their trade as money multipliers in Abidjan.

3.2.2 *The Poor Christ of Bomba*

The *Poor Christ of Bomba* by Mongo Beti was first published in1956 in Paris by Robert Laffont in French. The text analysed in this study is a 1971 translation by Gerald Moore.

Beti's *The Poor Christ of Bomba* unveils the story of Bomba, a small village in Cameroon. Most of the setting is colonial at a time when the Catholic missionaries flooded Africa. It is presented as a young teenager's dairy. The story is about a tour of a French Catholic missionary, Reverend Father Drumont, who finds himself in Cameroon with a view to evangelising the natives. He is convinced that African people have no any idea of God. The story revolves around father Drumont, Denis the father's boy, and Zacharia the cook.

Father Drumont has established himself at Bomba where most of his missionary work is done. Through the eyes of Denis the narrator, Father Drumont presents himself as Jesus; the natives do not see any difference between him and Jesus. He condemns all the traditions and cultural practices of the natives and instead imposes his beliefs on them. The truth of the matter is that Father Drumont does not understand the African people and their culture. He sets up an organisation known as the Sixa where young women who are betrothed are taken to be taught the Christian ways for several months in an attempt to save them from polygamist marriages under the pretext that they are being taught to embrace the idea of monogamy. In reality this Sixa house functions as a brothel, and women are sexually abused. They are vulnerable to the vultures of the Bomba mission like Zacharia and Raphael and even naïve Denis does not escape criticism as he is seduced by Catherine, one of the Sixa girls. Sex becomes the only option to evade the harsh

conditions of the Sixa, such as unpaid hard labour in various workshops, plantations and the elementary school.

Father Drumont has neglected the people in Tala region for three years, so he decides to visit them. “I am leaving the mission for two weeks. I am going to tour the Tala country which, as you know, I haven't visited for three years” (6). He embarks on this tour with Zacharia the cook and Denis the father’s “boy”. Denis is very excited about the tour. He anticipates that not only will the mission uplift the spiritual aspect but it will also bring material benefits. He comments: “and we need so many things – an organ for the new Church, a tractor for ploughing our fields, a generator for electric light, a motor-car, and so forth” (9). They tour small villages in the forest of Tala region. However, the natives in this region have remained largely resistant to Drumont’s religious teachings regardless of his mode of soliciting conversions through threats and misery. He employs an erroneous mode of proselytising the natives to his religion that is totally alien to the indigenous population. Only to a smaller extent do Tala people accept Christianity, and these converts are the ones that have left Tala for Bomba in villages that are scattered along the new roads. The men are not interested in hearing about Christ but are only interested in the financial possibilities that come with it.

As he goes round Tala, Father Drumont only allows those who have paid the cult fees to confess. Moving from one village to another, the tourists find most of the chapels are abandoned and are on the verge of collapsing. In an ironical twist the tour comes partly as enlightenment in the sense that this is when Denis starts receiving mixed messages about Father Drumont and the Christianity he represents. Drumont’s emphasis to pay the Church dues makes Denis think that their tour is merely a way of soliciting money for his mission. Father Drumont forces most of the natives to confess against their wishes. He takes everything too personally in the name of

evangelising the natives. As he proceeds with his mission, he drags Sanga Boto, the character who performs magic, shamefully through the village. Boto is made to abandon his faith and embraces that of Father Drumont: "Sanga Boto confessed everything, and was really scared! He was even converted" (79). In a similar way, he beats the Sixa girls harshly and forces them to testify.

At the end of the tour, Father Drumont is disillusioned that he has not achieved his objectives. In his conversation with Monsieur, the colonial administrator, Father Drumont acknowledges that there is no difference between his work and that of the administrators. He invites a member of the medical personnel to carry out a thoroughly medical checkup in the Sixa house and the results come to him as a great shock since the whole Sixa house is infected with sexually transmitted diseases. Finally, he abandons everything and returns to France.

3.2.3 *Arrow of God*

Arrow of God is a novel by Chinua Achebe and was first published in 1964 by Heinemann. The text analysed in this study is the 1986 edition.

The story is set in the early 20th century and it mostly narrates events of the pre-colonial and colonial period, when there is much foreign influence on the lives of the people. The story depicts the last few months of Umuaro under the divine protection of Ulu the high god. At the genesis of the story there is Ezeulu who is the priest of Ulu and chief priest of Umuaro performing the monthly yam ritual that leads each year to the New Yam Festival. However, there are eight good moons to be celebrated before the harvest. Ezeulu's role consists in announcing the new moon and performing the ritual for each season. This community has four market days, each marked by a festival.

Umuaro is a village community that comes into existence when the six villages come together seeking refuge. The six villages were being terrorised by the soldiers of Abame who failed to defeat them. They decided to come together so as to bring the attack to a halt. Initially each of these six villages venerated its own deity: these deities had outlived their usefulness and as a result they failed to exhibit their mystical power. The deities failed the people who later hired a strong team of medicine-men to install a common deity for them (15). The deity made by the fathers of the six villages was named Ulu. Therefore, Ulu is the people's creation. Although each single village had its own deity, their merging saw the god Ulu being exalted as the high god and his priest becoming the chief priest of Umuaro. They offered the priesthood of Ulu to the weakest among them to ensure that none in the alliance become too powerful (15). The war came to an end and Abame never terrorised the Umuaro people again.

After a taste of peace, Umuaro decides to wage war against Okperi over some farm land. However, Ezeulu advises the people of Umuaro not to go ahead with the fight for the land belongs to Okperi. Umuaro does not heed the chief priest's advice, remains adamant and takes its battalion to the battlefield. It is the killing of the emissary sent to Okperi that ignites the war. Mr. Winterbottom, the British colonial administrator, stops the war and destroys the guns belonging to Umuaro. Ezeulu testifies against Umuaro, arguing that their bone of contention is baseless because the farm land in question belongs to Okperi. This act indicates Ezeulu's betrayal of his own clan. Winterbottom's intervention fuels the pre-existing discord between Ezeulu's deity and the older deities that are already in a conflict.

Contrary to the people's expectations, Ezeulu who is the custodian of the Igbo culture and embodiment of African Traditional Religion sends his son to the new religion to be his eyes and ears. Oduche becomes estranged with each day that passes, and even causes an abomination

by caging the sacred python in a box with the view of terminating its life (50). This act is in line with what he is being taught by the new Church that the snake is evil. This brings fear within the family and Umuaro at large. They think Ezeulu should perform a sacrifice to amend the evil act committed by his son. However, the chief priest does not give in to the people's request. Looking at how Ezeulu acted when Umuaro and Okperi fought, Winterbottom favours Ezeulu for the position of warrant chief. He sends messengers to Umuaro to bring Ezeulu for a preliminary discussion (149). The traditional beliefs forbid the Chief Priest from travelling a great distance away from his home. Ignorant of this norm, Mr. Winterbottom summons Ezeulu to Okperi, the elders of Umuaro do nothing to prevent him from leaving his obi, and Ezeulu feels neglected. This scenario happens at a time when the new moon is about to appear. Ezeulu's absence leaves Umuaro with nobody to announce the new moon. Upon reaching Okperi, Ezeulu finds that Winterbottom has been stricken by an illness and has been rushed to hospital where he is admitted. Ezeulu is imprisoned after refusing to accept the position of warrant chief (156) and is put in custody.

When he is freed, he returns to his clan with malice, using his command as the 'watchman' to refuse to announce the 'New Yam' festival. He is convinced that this is Ulu's divine intervention and not his own act of revenge. He wants to strike vengeance for he thinks the people of Umuaro have betrayed him. The stubborn Ezeulu forgets that he is just the arrow in the bow of Ulu and that he is expected to fight Edemili (a smaller deity) who is fighting behind Nwaka. He refuses to announce the New Yam festival and justifies his action by telling his clansmen that he still had some yam to finish. He further states that Ulu does not permit him to do so because of the remaining yams. For instance Ezeulu tells the people that "Ulu did say that

two new moons came and went and there was no one to break kola nut to him and Umuaro kept silent" (208).

The people of Umuaro begin to starve, and in addition they are filled with fear that their new yams may go to waste. Not only is the chief priest punishing them but he is also destroying the Umuaro who initially invented the god upon which his power rests. The death of his son (Obika) amidst the conflicts is an indication of the limited powers he has: as a chief priest he cannot give back life to his dead son. Ezeulu thinks that Ulu has betrayed him and he starts to act strangely. The new religion sees the mounting crisis as a blessing; it takes advantage of the situation to win over the people. The new Church provides alternatives to the current crisis and the impending disaster, and the people of Umuaro are told to make offerings of thanks to the presumed true God so that they can harvest their crops without fear of Ulu (215). They are told to "bring to Church as many as they have received" (216). Umuaro becomes estranged with every passing moment and Ezeulu is left alone in his insane state with no followers.

3.2.4 Conclusion

This chapter has given a summary of the three primary texts used in this study without giving any analysis of the texts. The next chapter is going to outline the theme of religion in relating to the psychological enslavement of characters.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL ENSLAVEMENT OF CHARACTERS BY RELIGION

4.1 Introduction

The discussion in this chapter focuses on organised religion and how authors represent it in their novels. The chapter addresses a vital issue, namely the psychological impact of religion on the mind and behaviour of the relevant characters in the chosen narrative texts. It attempts to reveal the part played by religion in perpetuating both social oppression and psychological repression, and how characters in the novels become its victims. Also examined are the ways in which religious and political leaders become pretenders and play-actors in adopting the language of faith, performing a rhetorical discourse in the enslavement and oppression of others.

4.2 Religion as false consciousness

Selden, Widdowson and Brooker (2005:185) have said that it may be true that religious ideology interpellates individuals as God's subjects. Interpellation, according to Wolfreys, Robin and Womack, is

> a Marxist term often associated with the work of Louis Althusser denoting the ways in which subjects within an ideological system are placed in false positions of knowledge regarding themselves or otherwise constituted by an illusory self-knowledge the premise of which is autonomy; the subject, in comprehending him- or herself as having agency or freedom is positioned and placed in a self-deluding location with regard to his or her autonomy by external forces serving dominant capitalist interests" (2000:63).

Althusser argues that we are all 'subjects' of ideology which operates by summoning us to take our places in the social structure. The interpellation works through the discursive formations materially linked with 'state apparatuses' such as religion and education. The imaginary consciousness gives individuals a representation of the way they relate to their 'real conditions of existence,' such that the created image misrepresents the real relations between individuals and the social structure.

In *Arrow of God* Achebe brings in the idea of the fetish priest and the whole story revolves around him. One of the duties of fetish priests is to make sure that the village is safe. This is a heavy responsibility. In Umuaro, this responsibility is given to Ezeulu. This explains why Ezeulu is a character who epitomises the spiritual realm and pretends to act within its limits. However, the very religion that he elevates has objectified him. Ezeulu is interpellated by the religious ideology of his society: he can only see things through its lens, and this prevents him from gaining a wider perception of reality and, ultimately, of himself. For example, the narrator confirms that "He was no more than an arrow in the bow of his god" (191). This means that Ezeulu is an instrument, a tool or weapon used by the god. He cannot focus on anything outside his own objectification as the god's instrument since Ulu, not Ezeulu, determines what he thinks and does. He seems confused and does not understand the happenings around him. He becomes uncertain of the position he holds as a chief priest. Ezeulu is not led by reason and independent thinking. On the contrary, he is psychologically repressed and spiritually boxed in.

He tells the people that whatever he says is from the god Ulu. However, when Ezeulu enters the shrine alone he consults "the earthly mound which represented Ulu" (209). This implies that Ulu is merely a fetish in the sense that the god has been fashioned by human labour. According to the *Macmillan English Dictionary* (2007:547) a fetish is "an object believed to be magic or holy and worshipped by people." This confirms that the god Ulu, as a mound of earth, is a man-made object, a mere fetish. From this revelation, it is evident that the whole idea of a higher supernatural being beyond the human is being questioned.

The chief priest restricts people from entering the shrine in order to perpetuate the concept of the invented world in which characters believe that the god Ulu really does make decisions for them. Ulu is a constructed deity, and therefore cannot make any decision; instead it

is Ezeulu who continues to enjoy his social standing among the people of Umuaro. The step taken by the Umuaro community to create the god Ulu is actually in accordance with Feuerbach's thought of man *projecting* as well as inventing the idea of God. (Khan, 1995) For Feuerbach the idea of God stems from man's separation and outward projection from his own nature onto the thing or no-thing that is 'out there'; hence people turn their subjective nature into an imagined object, some being or entity which is outside themselves. The alienated human mind accepts the objective independence of its own imaginary creation. It is important to note that the root of the objectification of human nature into a god or gods is prompted by a sense of inadequacy and dependence. Writing on *Arrow of God*, Chidi Amuta contrasts the religion of the colonisers with the more 'human', down-to-earth religion of the Igbos, arguing that "man's conception of deity is essentially humanistic. Gods have a human face and their actions are predicated on human needs and necessities" (1996:401).Yet it is due to their inability to defend themselves from the soldiers of Abame that Umuaro became conscious of a supernatural being that would provide the needed security. This makes Umuaro more dependent on the projected object to which they attribute their human power and their good human nature. In Feuerbach's terms they become displaced from their own human potentiality. They are marginalised in that they no longer take an active role in decision-making. They believe that all decisions are dictated to them by Ulu through the god's mediator, chief priest Ezeulu. Furthermore, there is no positive movement toward self-realisation, since the will to reason for themselves has been suppressed.

As a chief priest, Ezeulu is not expected to leave his *obi*, and this is exactly what happens. He spends most of his time at his *obi* watching, trying to see the sign of the new moon. This suggests that Ezeulu is a mere watchman: he is turned into an instrument of the god. He watches his family disintegrate because he cannot solve the conflicts among his sons, having

become detached from them. Religion has objectified him and he exists as a log. His repression, and what George Orwell called 'double think' (2016) that absolves him from personal responsibility, are also noted at the time when he acknowledges that "It could not be my wish to ruin all these people. It could not be my wish to make the smallest man in Umuaro suffer. But this is not my doing. The gods sometimes use us as a whip" (209). Here Ezeulu affirms how his position as a chief priest has enslaved him in the sense that he cannot act according to his own independent thoughts but has become alienated from himself. As the story unfolds, the narrator gives us more access to Ezeulu's inner thoughts, yet there is no personal progression to be noted in the chief priest. Instead his priestly status, his patriarchal and autocratic attitude, and his rigid adherence to the dictates of his religion lead him to destruction.

Kourouma's complete title *Allah is not obliged to be fair for all the things that he does on earth* is the statement that drives the whole story, and the characters have internalised it. It is an utterance that cannot be questioned because it has been put forward as a divine revelation, and characters use it as their philosophy. "*Allah is not obliged*" (215) is a revealing title that informs how Allah, the Supreme Being as the Muslims confess, does not act under any outside forces. This tells why the characters fail to do anything valuable outside the religious circle because the basis of their belief system is oppressive and gives the characters false hope.

This idea of false consciousness is evident throughout the novel as Kourouma uses the recurring theme of religion to illustrate the oppression experienced by the characters through the power and language of the leaders. The fact that characters cling to false hope is reason enough to conclude that they have become reconciled *in practice*, if not in their minds, to their beleaguered status. The novel's title has caged the characters: they refer unthinkingly to the sentence that has been made the novel's title, repeating it as a mantra and thus showing that they

accept their situation. Such statements are the foundation that provides the characters with a *Weltanschaung* or totalising world-view. The repeated use of the sentence in the title by the narrator is there simply to highlight how those in privileged positions use religious language to suppress or prevent the less privileged from attaining a measure of independent self-realisation, manipulated as they are by the promise of a life which, for the majority, is unattainable – in Freud's terms, religious faith and belief in a God of love is an illusion. What Kourouma makes clear is that people's hopes are unrealistic, and that the vast majority never realise their dreams and expectations which religious belief and faith constantly encourage. False consciousness deters both the oppressors and the oppressed from obtaining self-realisation, pushing them further into solitude to the point where they become detached from social reality. They live lonely, alienated lives.

Kourouma's *Allah Is Not obliged* is a microcosm of reality for the power-hungry leaders during the post-colonial period in West African countries. This is a period of civil war in this setting, and Kourouma strategically places the religious warlords in this setting. Unfortunately the narrating voice indicates that the religious warlords are all acting contrary to their supposed religious conviction. Religion is used ideologically to sustain the material wealth, physical power and political dominance of the supposedly religious men. In line with Karl Marx's views, religion is employed to alter people's perception of reality in ways that serve the interests of the ruling class (Khan, 1995). Marx argues that the class that controls economic production also controls the propagation of ideas in society. Therefore, religion operates as an ideological weapon used by the ruling class to justify the suffering of the poor as something inevitable and God-given. Religion is used to corrupt the minds of the poor into believing that their suffering is virtuous and that they will be favoured in the hereafter. Those in the privileged positions use

religion psychologically to manipulate the people and keep them from attempting any change by creating a 'mystical fog' that masks reality.

Referring to the same concept, Kourouma ably uses Birahima's mother to unveil the ills of religion as the prime agency of false consciousness. The woman is presented in her deteriorating state. She is in agony, and the Malinke Muslim elders use religion to justify her suffering by stating that she is destined to suffer, for her happiness is in paradise. The religious leaders inculcate the idea among the exploited majority that they are destined to suffer. God has made them the way they are so no one can alter their condition. Such statements make people believe that everything is predestined and as a result they become idle. Lerner in this context observes that religious ideology helps adherents to satisfy their desire to believe in a "just world" in which people "deserve what they get and get what they deserve (1980). Maman needs an expert to attend to her; unfortunately, the idea of fate makes her accept her condition. She is convinced that she is destined to suffer. Akinfenwa *et al.* (2014:8) contend that "religion provides a vent and creates a disconnect between man and hopelessness…, it absorbs the heart of the pounds of suffering, and puts on man a garb of hope which will get to be shown off on the spiritual and mundane runway." Organised religion blinds people to the physical realities of the here and now since there is so much emphasis on destiny. One is made to bear the pain and hold on to the idea of an imaginary paradise.

Marx (as quoted by Khan) famously states that religion is the sigh of the oppressed peolpe, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of spiritless conditions. It is the opium of the people (1995: 149). For Marx, religion is a consolation for people who are both oppressed and repressed, providing the enabling conditions for such people to be taken advantage of and economically exploited. The other interpretation of Maman's predicament could be that the

Muslim elders do not want to seek medication from the 'toubab' hospital as it is believed that only traditional medicine, which is bound up with animism, idolatry and magic, is capable of healing her. The sickness is, however, intentionally inflicted on Maman; the narrator shows how the charlatans use religion to perpetuate suffering. The narrator mocks religion, saying that Maman is a devout Muslim when a 'healer' is consulted whose beliefs are contrary to Maman's religious beliefs. She is culturally repressed and exploited by the Malinke Muslim elders who nevertheless want to benefit from Balla, the fetish priest. It is noted that within the Malinke Muslim community, true believers are not allowed to come anywhere near the fetish priest because he is considered a heathen or infidel:

> "No one was allowed near Balla's hut, but actually at night everyone went to his hut. Some people even went during the day, because Balla practiced sorcery, native medicine, magic and a million other extravagant customs." (8)

The narrator informs us that Balla has multiple identities. As a fetish priest, he is consulted by Malinke elders on many issues, some communal and others personal. Balla is also a hunter and a sorcerer. As a hunter, he is a provider, while a sorcerer is a man with magical powers, one who is assisted by evil spirits. All these titles amount to the title of "fetish priest," but the charlatans use such priests in order to maintain their personal identity and physical well-being; they want to fit in with the majority and yet still be in a privileged position. The Malinke are shown to be full of duplicity because their actions are contrary to what they advocate. In Togobala, the Malinke Muslim elders publicly proclaim themselves as devout Muslims, but everyone privately fears the fetish priest.Although Balla's profession as a juju man is assigned a low social status, he is able to find a space among Muslims because the Malinke way of life combines Islam with African tradition.

Kourouma mocks religion as a solution to real problems because the actions of the Malinke Muslims elders show that the mystical force in Islam is incapable of healing Maman, a devout Muslim. Yet Balla is consulted by these Malinke Muslim elders who allow the union between Maman and Balla so that they can have access to Balla's amulets or jujus. In short Maman is commodified. Kourouma narrates her desperate situation to expose the hypocrisy of the Malinke Muslim elders who are more concerned with self-gratification than in curing Maman; they are merely interested in serving their own physical, material and practical interests. All efforts to heal Maman prove fruitless; as a result she becomes isolated, builds walls around herself and exists as an object that has no right to health. Maman is marginalised and entrapped in a patriarchal society and a patriarchal religion. When her husband dies, marriage arrangements are made immediately: "according to the laws of the Qur'an and of religion, Maman was not allowed to stay unmarried for more than a year of twelve moons, she had to be properly married with a proper dowry of cola nuts" (22). But the only qualified and therefore Malinke Muslim to marry her is the brother of the deceased husband, Issa. Regarding her health, Issa refuses to yield to the demands of religion and his reaction to the marriage proposal works to the advantage of the Malinke Muslim elders who force Balla the animist to marry Maman, going against their culture and religious teachings. It is noted that Balla is treated like an outcast because initially he refused to become a Muslim:

> "a kaffir – that's what you call someone who refuses to believe in Islam and keeps his grigris. Balla refused to burn his false idols, so he wasn't a Muslim, he didn't perform the five daily prayers, or fast one month every year. The day he dies, no Muslim is allowed to go to his funeral, and they are not allowed to bury his body in the Muslim cemetery. And strictly speaking, nobody is allowed to eat the meat of any animal whose throat he slits" (8).

And yet this is the reliable fetish priest who is assigned to appease the ancestral spirits and heal Maman. The fetish priest is ostracized, yet against his beliefs he is made to recite "Allahu Akbar

and bismillah" (22) as an admission requirement for becoming a Muslim. Balla is indoctrinated, made to internalise the negative image of himself, and to embrace Islamic beliefs in which he is not grounded.

The creed is given by the Imam for Balla to qualify to properly marry Maman. The Imam is a charlatan who misuses his religious authority. According to Shillington, "belief in Islam required simply a belief in One True God and acceptance of His will as revealed by the Prophet Muhammed" (2012: 80). The creed is known as the 'shahadah,' and "must be recited aloud and correctly once in a lifetime with full understanding and commitment of the heart" (Al Hoad, 1986: 9). This tells us that a person must be well informed and then make a decision by which one will live. Going by Shillington's statement, it is true that the conversion of Balla to Islam does not give a clear intention of conversion: the whole process is lacking. Balla is forced to say the creed but does not do so wholeheartedly. Kourouma mocks the creed itself, however, because Balla unwillingly repeats it; it does not carry any religious significance and he becomes a Muslim in the eyes of the Malinke Muslim elders only, a Muslim for their convenience. By bringing out the idea of the creed as a ticket for entrance into Islam, the narrator demonstrates the artificiality of religion as a social organisation. The Imam is a representation of those in privileged positions who use language to deceive individuals. The narrator points out that these religious leaders can change and adapt their language at any time to perpetuate their domination. Balla does not abandon his faith and duty as a fetish priest, but there is no indication in the story of Balla living an Islamic way of life.

Like Maman who is marginalised, Ezeulu's wives are marginalised characters who do not take active roles in the important doings of their polygamous family and religion, a religion which they nevertheless embrace wholeheartedly. They are treated as puppets in the hands of their husbands. For instance:

> "Oduche's mother, Ugoye, was not happy that her son should be chosen as a sacrifice to the new church. She tried to reason with her husband, but he was impatient with her: "how does it concern you what I do with my sons?" (46)

It is evident that Ugoye has no right to determine what happens to her son Oduche; she is separated from her own son, the flesh-and-blood product of her own labour. The author shows how religion and culture intertwine to augment women's vulnerability and alienation. Ugoye has been made powerless. She decides to tell her grievances to the god Ulu during the pumpkin festival:

> "Great Ulu who kills and saves, I implore you to cleanse my household of all defilement. If I have spoken it with my mouth or seen it with my eyes, or if I have heard it with my ears or stepped on it with my foot or if it has come through my children or my friends or kinsfolk let it follow these leaves" (72).

From this prayer, it becomes apparent that Ugoye is blinded by both culture and religion. Thus she is unable to reason well. In this case the superego dominates. Ugoye is psychologically displaced in her desire for religious perfection. She is an example of characters deceived by organised religion, victims of self-deception and false consciousness inculcated by a male god. Ugoye, powerless and marginal, is like Celie in *The Color Purple* (1982), a victim of sexual abuse, who in her seclusion imagines there is someone out there who will listen to her, and this is the time she starts communicating to God. Celie begins writing letters to the absent God, sharing with him the unspeakable circumstances of her life and asking for 'a sign'. Both Ugoye and Celie are socially alienated, but their turn to religion merely fuels their alienation. In their seclusion they tell their problems to an absent God who does not respond, which supports the Marxist view of alienated man creating God.

It is ironic that Balla is permitted to marry Maman. On the other hand, the Malinke Muslim elders see it as unacceptable for Birahima to be under the guardianship of Balla in that

his activities are too disgusting to be a good role model for the young Muslim. Associating with Balla may make him grow up to be like Balla himself:

> "Balla was teaching me hunting and animism and magic instead of teaching me the holy word of Allah from the Qur'an. My grandmother didn't approve of what Balla was teaching me. She wanted to send me away, far away from Balla, because she was afraid I would grow up to be a Bambara Kaffir *feticheur*, and not a proper Malinke who performed the five daily prayers" (28).

The titles 'Bambara, Kaffir, *feticheur*' given to Balla demean him, to reduce him to a thing of no value. The puzzle is that the idea of Balla being a bad influence on Maman is never raised. These are some of the unanswered questions that trouble the protagonist. He is antagonised in the sense that he is forced to leave Balla to be with El hajj Yacouba, the Muslim fetish priest, under the pretext of imparting Islamic values to the boy. Birahima's conscience constantly struggles with these hypocritical and false religious values he has been saddled with.

In Achebe's novel, a similarly confusing opposition and intersection between different religious faiths and practices emerges with the appearance of a new Church in Umuaro, portrayed as a danger to the native religion. Yet Ezeulu decides to send Oduche to the new Church. This implies that Oduche is the one to carry the burden of Umuaro, just like his father. He has also been rendered powerless in that he cannot act according to his will with a clear-headed consciousness of who he is and what he is supposed to do. He is trapped between two illusory worlds and the physical world. For instance, he fails to kill the sacred python which is spurned by the Christians since it is compared to the evil serpent in the story of Adam and Eve, whereas it is considered as sacred and therefore venerated in African tradition religion. The clash of religions leading to implosion and disintegration reaches a climax after Ezeulu's imprisonment, portrayed as a way of disempowering him as he cannot discharge one of the most salient roles he is initiated for, that of announcing of the New Yam Festival. This marks the disintegration of Umuaro as the characters cannot pretend to remain loyal to Ulu. Ezeulu is

acting out of anger in the story and this anger can be traced back to the Okperi episode. The people challenge Ezeulu's powers by not listening to him and it is at this moment that he starts looking for the best time to strike. His action is in line with Young's statement that "in its new usage oppression designates the disadvantage and injustice some people suffer not because a tyrannical power coerces them, but because of the everyday practices of a well-intentioned liberal society" (2014: 5). The injustice Umuaro experiences is due to Ezeulu's use of authority invested in him to achieve his selfish goal. He is aware that his people live by the dictates of religion and that they will not perceive anything beyond that which religion demands; they, like him, remain trapped in the web of religion. Though the coercive force of "tyrannical power" may be less in evidence here than "everyday practices", the people's hunger and distress show that oppression is a reality when Ezeulu punishes them.

The tyrannical power of religion is more striking in the work of father Drumont in *The Poor Christ of Bomba*, who claims that the Sixa house he constructs for women who are betrothed is an attempt to make them embrace the Christian dogma of monogamous marriage. However, in an African polygamous context, combined with so-called Christian dogma and coercion, the Sixa house turns out to be a breeding house for injustices committed against women. Nfah-Abbenyi (1997:4) notes that sexuality is a site of abuse, exploitation and domination of women by the predominantly patriarchal society.It is under the pretext of new religious values that these Sixa women are shown to be sexually abused by the men who are in charge of them. The activities of the Sixa house show that the house is a brothel. The women are also subjected to hard labour, being forced to provide free labour for construction and plantations. The harsh everyday practices and physical realities of the Sixa house make the women internalise their oppression and reduce themselves to sexual objects. Their loneliness and

isolation also support the Marxist theory of 'the forces of production.' The Sixa women are working at an unforgiving labour-intensive job, providing hard labour under very difficult conditions, and are still at the bottom of the economic hierarchy. Although they are a major force of production there is an absence of enjoyment in the lives of these characters as they are not rewarded for the contributions they make to the economy. From the fact that they are caged, these Sixa women are shown to be socially dislocated, living a lonely existence and using their bodies to sort out their problems. The medical personnel's report highlights to Reverend Father Drumont that the whole Sixa domicile is infected with sexually transmitted diseases.

The confusing mix of religions and the contradiction between religious creed and social practice, both of which have oppressive consequences facilitated by the false consciousness of the victims, are seen in *Allah Is Not Obliged* when Birahima works under warlord Sister Hadja Gabrielle Aminata whom he describes as being "one-third Muslin, one-third Catholic and one-third animist" (180). She is commonly known as sister Aminata in the story. She tells the outside world that she is defending the virginity of the girls she has confined. The truth of the matter is that she is busy subjecting the girls to inhuman conditions like genital mutilation, making them child-soldiers and killing those she believes are misbehaving. She does the killing using the AK-47 she is armed with. The narrator says the actions of Sister Aminata are truly disgusting: "the unit was run by a vicious cow who was trigger-happy with a machine-gun" (180). *Allah Is Not Obliged's* built-in dictionary states that a 'cow' is a fat woman with bad manners.

4.3 Enslavement in organised religion

Arrow of God brings to light how ancient rituals infiltrate contemporary rituals. Like the old ways of sacrificing human beings for atonement, Ezeulu's preference as the chief priest of Ulu is seen as a sacrifice to atone for the sins of Umuaro. However, Ezeulu's role as a sacrificial lamb, in contemporary ritual practice, is to "go ahead and confront danger before it reached his

people" (189). He carries within him the communal spirit. This is best exemplified during the Pumpkin festival when he is seen to confront danger. He wards off evil from the community. The practice of sacrifice seems to impact negatively on human beings as it is often done against one's will. The idea of using a scapegoat to redeem the sins of the community (or, in the Christian narrative of Jesus Christ the Son of God, the sins of mankind) proves to be a futile undertaking as there is no single society that records an end to its problems through sacrifice no matter how perfect the ritual sacrifice may be. For instance, Soyinka's *The Strong Breed* (1963) depicts a society that believes so much in the sacrifice of a human being, preferably a stranger, for the atonement of the community. Eman, a stranger, is sacrificed with the view to wash away evil from the community. Although he dies, problems continue. Referring to the idea of sacrifice, Catherine Clement and Julia Kristeva (2001:106) point out:

> In *Moses and Monotheism*, Freud sees Christianity as a successful attempt to lift the repression of a human sacrifice... As often with Freud, the hypothesis is fragile, but the demonstration is not lacking in audacity. The crucifixion of Jesus would thus be a return to human sacrifice, which a father applies to his son.

Jesus is seen as a scapegoat. He is sent by his father to atone for the sins of the world but sin continues to exist. The idea of sacrificing an individual for atonement enslaves characters. Living by prescribed rules and dictates, they think they are obliged to perform the rituals in fear of the wrath of God. These characters are psychologically displaced as the superego seems to express itself too much; they therefore become obsessed with the idea of perfection, and what comes to light is that all these individuals who are used for sacrifice are already oppressed with low social status. The idea of sacrificing a person for the atonement process is shown to be a horrific act.

The observance of many rituals signals an attempt to remain true to one's beliefs; however, the rite of passage practised in Kourouma's novel demonstrates that it is a barbaric act done to the characters as it shows elements of a death trap. No character tells of a good experience; what strikes one is the pain inflicted on those who undergo a horrific act. Male circumcision and female clitori dectomy are examples of rituals conducted to mark the transition from one stage to another in life. In Kourouma's narrative the protagonist's mother suffers

injuries incurred in the ceremony of excision (clitoris removal). Thus Birahima's mother can be seen as representative of all those who have been crushed by dominant religious concepts. Her life as a crippled woman contrasts with her pretty youthful life. Kourouma implies that the pain is created and compounded by the system she is born into:

> they cut something out of my mother, but unfortunately maman's blood didn't stop, it kept gushing like a river swollen by a storm. All her friends had stopped bleeding. That meant that maman was the one who was to die at the place of excision. That's the way of the world, the price that has to be paid (14).

Though valued, the ritual seems to be a rigid custom whose function is that of repression and enslavement. The bad outcome of the ritual signals that maman is the one to be sacrificed. In the narrator's words: "That's the way of the world". It seems that there is nothing one can do because it is predestined. Mamans imply has to yield in to the demands of the world. This view of the world is what Karl Marx passionately argues against; he advocates that people should be led by reason, not by faith. The people in Kourouma's novel are blinded by the language and actions of the Moussokoroni or fetish priest. The Bambara Moussokoroni perpetuates maman's enslavement by striking her with the ulcer.

Birahima's narrative tells us that religion has been used to justify maman's suffering. This is evident in the narrator's grandmother's words:

> Dry your tears and stop your bawling…Allah created each one of us and decided our fate, the colour of our eyes, our height and our sufferings. You were born with pain from your ulcer. It is He who gave you your time to live out on this earth in a hut, wrapped in a blanket near a hearth... He makes you suffer here on earth to purify you so that one day he can grant you paradise and eternal happiness. (9)

Grandmother's words show how religion makes people brush aside the social realities and embrace the illusory world of the hereafter. Religion disguises and legitimates the exploitative relationships of society by suggesting that the world is shaped by god's will and is therefore unchangeable. The characters are not provided with a springboard from which they can solve

their problems. Though in pain, Maman cannot act to free herself; she is trapped and enslaved by the religious teachings which prevent her from gaining in self-realisation. Religious discourse shapes her world view, narrows it down, so that she must accept living with the burden of the pain. The author uses her condition to question the authenticity of organised religions, of any religion that can justify the enslavement and destruction of an individual life. Birahima says: "I had only seen her at her worst, in the last stages of her multifarious, multi-coloured decay, but I called her ma" (11). The fact that she is not named in the novel signifies that she is devalued as a human being. Mamam is made to endure pain and discrimination, believing she is fulfilling God's plan. As Julia Kristeva states: "there is nothing sacred about religion, that religion: "it sentences women to the 'wall' of the head scarf; it fates them to submission; it coldly kills all those who do not share extremist dogma" (2001: 166).

Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *The River Between* (1971) evokes a society in which only a circumcised woman is perceived to be beautiful: "Circumcision was the central rite in the Gikuyu way of life" (36). The narrator informs us that Muthoni, who has been brought up as a Christian, still wants to be identified with her people of the tribe. Waiyaki remembers Muthoni's words: "I want to be a woman made beautiful in the tribe…" (43). It is from this standpoint that Muthoni decides to embrace African traditional religion, yet the act of circumcision sees Muthoni through to her death. Blinded by the dictates of the tribe, she internalises her enslavement to religious custom (valorised as devotion) and becomes a repressed individual. In her imagination she sees Jesus and is a beautiful woman at the moment of her death, but for Livingstone in Ngugi's novel, "The death of Muthoni forever confirmed the barbarity of rigid Gikuyu customs" (53).

In Kourouma's text, the narrator himself is subjected to a harsh rite of passage. Though the Malinke elders have prepared a conducive environment for circumcision, from Birahima's point of view it is not a good place. He speaks of the cleared spaces on the edge of the jungle where a very tall, old man assigned to perform the circumcision comes out of the forest looking like a blacksmith. He is also a strong *féticheur* and shaman (29). Birahima confirms that "it's really painful, but that's the Malinké tradition" (29). Thus Malinké tradition deprives an individual of choice. Birahima is psychologically tormented by the violent act done to him but at the same time he thinks that there is nothing that he can do: it's tradition. Similarly, Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1962) criticises rigid Igbo customs such as disowning twins. The Igbo are shown as people who rely on superstition and strive to remain loyal to their rigid customs. The birth of twins is seen as a taboo because twins are perceived as the consequence of evil deeds. Any twin born is left to die in the evil forest as a way of disposing the evil in order to prevent it coming into the family. In this regard, Achebe shows how African traditional religious beliefs shield reality, enslaving characters obsessed with the idea of obedience and submission.

Musunga in Malama's *Bitterness* (2005) is another character in the literary world who is presented as being in bondage. Just at birth he is given a name that connotes enslavement: "You were named Musunga because your work shall be to hold things together in harmony. You are one who holds…You shall fulfill your works according to the oracle of Chipepa." (17). This tells us that he is the custodian of the Ng'umbo tradition, therefore must live his life by the dictates of the oracle. As a way of trying to remain loyal to the custom, Musunga goes to the shrine where he is initiated as a future priest. Contrary to Musunga, Philip in Echewa's *The Land's Lord* (1976) is the custodian of ancestral tradition. He is consecrated at birth to the Yam-god Ihi Njoku, "Njoku Ekogu, consecrated to the biggest god that this land knows" (19). However, he

defies tradition by running away on the night of his initiation as Ihi Njoku. Philip acknowledges that he is "born a slave to duty" with "no choice and no voice" (138). He flees to Christianity for a refuge from enslavement, the irony of which is that Father Higler engages him to further his own priestly mission, using Philip to perform a variety of subservient roles such as cook, catechist, server of mass, houseboy and bodyguard, none of which he is paid for. Not wanting to serve the harsh conditions of his tradition he ends up being exploited – jumping out of the frying pan into the fire. The stronger the influence of religion, the more oppressive it is, and this idea is one that also deconstructs and demystifies religion as a social force exerting economic and political *power* and *control*. The more power in numbers, wealth, weapons and technology a culture possesses, the more power its religion has to enslave the minds of defeated victims and subordinates.

In Beti's text, Denis is exposed to rigid beliefs that prevent him from flourishing. Drumont brainwashes him into believing in the supernatural rather than teaching him to think. His belief system can no longer function on the same level as that of his people. His psyche has been altered. For instance, he is tormented by the thought of his sin with Catherine, one of the girls from the Sixa house. The sin is linked to the thought of sin in Christian tradition. He is always dwelling on it because he views it as an obstacle to the presumed paradise; it is a burden that gives him psychological torture. And this is the moment that Denis uses tricks to evade serving mass with Father Drumont. Truly it would be right to state that religion is viewed as a poisoned chalice, perpetuating mental enslavement.

Beti's story reveals the deception, hypocrisy and moral decadence that has hit Bomba village. However, the characters' spiritual stance seems to one that enslaves and diminishes their lives. The Sixa women are disempowered by Father Drumont, who draws a circle that makes it

difficult for them to cross over. Being powerless, the Sixa women are strategically positioned to take orders from those who are in privileged positions such as Raphael. With his egoism, Raphael turns out to be an abuser who dominates the Sixa abode:

> …but she hadn't really any choice, for if she refused Raphael would send her back to the heavy work…She had gradually come to understand that everyone in the Sixa had to dance to Raphael's tune if they were to avoid suffering… (173)

Though father Drumont is against traditional African religious teachings and the practice of polygamy, his actions result in its perpetration. The Bomba men do not object to taking their women to the Sixa house because they take new ones immediately after they leave. Beti is mocking religion for its inability to end problems; instead it exacerbates problems and augments the moral decay in society.

4.4 Estrangement of characters in organised religion

Religious institutions generate ideologies that reconstruct reality. The characters then internalise these ideologies and act in accordance with them, having the illusion that they are in control, that they are free to believe whatever it is they believe. What they fail to recognize is that these ideologies mask reality, so the characters begin to fantasise and make up stories, inventing illusions that distance them from their real conditions of life. For instance in *Arrow of God*, Ezeulu is central to the existence of Umuaro. Izevbaye (2010:36) observes that "he is essentially an incarnation of his function as scapegoat, and after his ordination as Ezeulu–"Priest [of] Ulu"–even his natal name is discarded or forgotten." This simply means subjugation to the rules of Umuaro's established order and performance of his duty. Ezeulu is thus self-estranged; he is shown to have separated himself from friends and family from the time when he becomes the chief priest. He can no longer act on his free will. He is alienated from his own people. This is evident when his friend Akuebue says: "I am not the man to dispute any of the things you say,

Ezeulu. I am your friend and I can talk to you as I like; but that does not mean I forget that one half of you is man and the other half spirit" (134). Akuebue highlights that Ezeulu is estranged from himself: he is half-human.

Ezeulu, the scapegoat for Umuaro, sends his son to the new religion as a sacrificial lamb, deluding himself that he is sending him as his 'eyes'. However, the new religion fuels the estrangement within Ezeulu's family. Oduche becomes strange to himself, his culture and his community; he no longer acts like one of them. The narrator affirms this when he says "Ezeulu had already spoken strongly to his son who was becoming stranger every day." (47) It is evident he is entrapped in two illusory worlds conceptualised with different images. His dilemma is illustrated when he cages the python and fails to kill it despite being told that it is evil because all his life he has grown to learn that it is sacred. He is thus estranged from himself, and this is also observed by Izevbaye (2010:35) who says: "ironically, Oduche's alienation from his prescient father begins as he acquires literacy, that is, when he learns to communicate in silence with an absent interlocutor and can exclude his family from the 'conversation' even when they are physically present." Oduche is out of touch with himself as he seems not to reason as he acts. Referring to self-estrangement, Nassir quotes Marx:

> To say that man is estranged from himself, therefore, is the same thing as saying that the society of this estranged man is a caricature of his real community, of his true species-life, that his activity therefore appears to him as a torment, his own creation as an alien power, his wealth as poverty, the essential bond linking him with other men as an unessential bond, and separation from his fellow men, on the other hand, as his true mode of existence. (221)

For Marx, the estranged person is displaced and forced into isolation. Ulu is a deity created by human labour, but Ezeulu's loyalty to Ulu illustrates his estrangement from that labour (apart from the labour of sitting, talking, giving orders and eating). Ulu's power and authority are abstractions from the social reality of actual power relations and agricultural labour, which is

marginalised in the story. Ezeulu perpetuates his own illusions and that of his people, and at the end, deserted by Umuaro and Ulu, he becomes more and more isolated. The community of Umuaro is also silent: "So with every passing day Umuaro became more and more an alien silence" (220). Ezeulu is also psychologically disturbed, as shown in his reaction upon hearing that his son Obika is dead. "A priest like Ezeulu leads a god to ruin himself…or perhaps a god like Ulu leads a priest to ruin himself" (215). The statement sums up the confusing ambivalence of religion, how it displaces the believer and leads to his self-estrangement.

Father Drumont detaches himself both from his own people and from the natives on whose lives he has encroached. He establishes himself as a God among the people of Bomba and deceives them with his appearance that he is Jesus. He thus comes to live in an imaginary world which he himself has abstracted from reality. The vivid illustration of this is the language barrier that exists between himself and his parishioners: he does not share the code with those whom he claims to be evangelising. Beti's satire shows Father Drumont comporting himself strangely, and his world-view is narrowed to an alien religion. Yet he portrays himself as omniscient: "Of course, people say that in time Le Guen will become just like Father Drumont, pig-headed, quick to anger, deaf to everything that is said to him, doing everything according to his own ideas" (9).Through the character of Father Drumont, Beti reveals that those in privileged positions use both religion and patriarchal power to assert their dominance in the social structure, but for Drumont, ever oblivious, this creates a gulf between himself and the reality around him. Malaba points out that "His utter self-assurance, linked to his authoritarianism, blinds him to the reality of what is going on in his mission" (1998:197). This implies that religion when used as a weapon to manipulate others can mask reality from those who propagate it, thereby estranging them from that reality.

Though all the central characters in the examined texts are displaced, Kourouma's story is told by a naïve, disoriented central character who believes that he cannot lead a good life because he is cursed. Curses instil fear, and this is what happens to Birahima, who internalises and forms the most negative image of himself based on the curse. The vulgar language of the protagonist is a symptom of his profound estrangement from civilised society. He accustoms himself to the use of obscene, ritualised utterances such as "*faforo*! Meaning my father's cock – or your father's or somebody's father's, *gnamokodé*! (bastard)" (2). He further acknowledges that his whole life and everything round him is fucked (4). He is thus completely detached from 'normal' society. Birahima is shown to be out of touch with himself despite being under the care of his life coach El hajj Yacouba, whom he believes will be instrumental in imparting good Islamic values. Contrary to Islamic principles, however, the narrator reveals Yacouba's disgusting traits that have comfortably accrued in his mind. As the story ends, Birahima fails to unite with his aunty but only sees her dead body, implying that all his dreams of a better life are shattered. He ends up a disoriented child whose world-view is shaped by violence. Yacouba and all the warlords are presented as perpetrators of the imaginary world.

In *The Poor Christ of Bomba* Denis the father's boy is heavily influenced by the grotesque ways of father Drumont. He is indoctrinated at a very tender age, so that his world-view seems to be in tandem with that of father Drumont. He has internalised the Christian teachings and this has altered his belief system. He no longer identifies himself with indigenous African values and ways of life. He is a child of no world.Like his mentor, Denis alienates himself from his own people and culture, and thus lives in isolation in his fantasy world. He thinks that most of the ways of his people are sinful and lead to damnation.

Just as Achebe's characters rush to the new Church for immunity, evading Ulu's wrath, Kourouma's characters flock to Prince Johnson believing that he is God-sent. This is dangerous to him and those who run to him wanting to live a righteous life. Mugo writes on Soyinka that "there are no direct solutions to problems of life and any individual who imagine himself a heaven-sent saviour who comes to flag down an end to the suffering of others only engages in a futile undertaking" (147). This can be applied to Prince Johnson's predicament. He is not true to the life he leads and has detached himself from reality, propagating an illusory world. The warlords' followers are psychologically stunted with no self-realisation. These Church followers fear to commit a sin, desperately cleaving to an eschatological meaning that eventually makes them hold on to their enslavement and suffering. Wole Soyinka, by contrast, argues that "salvation for men will only come about as a result of complete self-awareness" (Mugo, 145). Implicitly Soyinka acknowledges that people possess within themselves all the potential they need to live happy lives, yet continually waste their energies by looking in the wrong places. Freud's superego operates in full swing on these burdened characters who are only concerned with perfection and noble ideals which in the end lead to their oppression. While trying to cling to religion, their illusory ideology or 'God delusion' fuels their alienation, detaching them from asocial reality that can only be changed by practical means, not by pious hopes and dreams.

Notable in Beti's text is the maltreatment, oppression and hypocrisy that come with the Reverend Father Drumont's religion and the flaws embedded in the native religion. Beti is questioning the role of religion in society. Drumont's quest to evangelise the natives turns out to be a mode of disempowering the natives. They are trapped in the shackles of religion and become estranged. As Oged says,

> The separation of the African peoples from their indigenous religion exemplifies a particular form of violence perfected by colonization because the enterprise

> presented an ambivalent situation that suppressed the African's character, creating a sense of the individual being divided from the self. By alienating the individual from his/her orthodox life principle without connecting him/her firmly to any alternative regenerative new one, conversion, in trying to make African peoples whole, leads them even further away from harmony; instead of conferring salvation, the mental and psychological torment of conversion becomes tantamount to earthly damnation. (2011:153)

This act translates into the people of Bomba detaching themselves from the values they have grown to embrace, forcing strange beliefs on them in an overt demonstration of repressive power. Worth noting is that this repression is entwined in the web of power relations and rooted in political discourses, hence making the characters voiceless.

The River Between depicts a society in which organised religions play a bigger role in the mental fixation of the characters. Most are shown to be out of touch with themselves. This is evident when Joshua is described as follows:

> he had clothed himself with a religion decorated and smeared with everything white. He renounced his past and cut himself away from those life-giving traditions of the tribe. And because he had nothing to rest upon, something rich and firm on which to stand and grow, he had to cling with his hands to whatever the missionaries taught him was his promised future." (2007: 141)

Here the narrative voice targets a "white" religion that strips the African of all the values he has cherished and leaves him with nothing to hold on to. It makes one a stranger to himself, to culture and to society as a whole.

In Beti's text, deeper forms of powerlessness are more insidious. The experience of utter powerlessness is the strongest form of oppression, and in this case it allows the Sixa women to oppress themselves. Oppressed people become so powerless that they do not even talk about their oppression. They are silenced in a way that is difficult to voice out or express. Young quotes Freire calling this a culture of silence (2014).The ridiculous teachings of father Drumont have silenced the women, whose bodies are turned into sex objects.

It is imperative to note that these characters in the three examined novels do not become aware of their self-estrangement but often accept the world as it is. Victims of oppression often internalise their oppression to the point where they eventually oppress themselves. Cerniglia (2011:314) cites Feuerbach, arguing "not only that Humanity created and made itself dependant on God, but also that this dependence prevented humanity from reaching its full potential." For Feuerbach, good human attributes are projected onto an invented object, leaving specifically human potentialities which make an individual a member of the human species unrealised.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the identified traces of religious oppression in the primary texts. It established that characters are tied to religion psychologically and this is in accord to what Marx calls false consciousness. It has also highlighted how religious teachings mentally enslave characters who resort to work under religious duress. The next chapter will discuss the hypocrisy of religious leaders in the three selected narratives.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE HYPOCRISY OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the hypocrisy and materialism practised by religious leaders in the novels under investigation. According to the *Macmillan English Dictionary* (2007:744) hypocrisy is "behaviour in which someone claims to have certain moral principles or beliefs but behaves in a way that shows they are not sincere." In short, hypocrisy implies double standards. In relation to the aforesaid, religion shows the inconsistency of human motivation and behaviour. Religious hypocrisy and its portrayal in the three novels constitute the authors' greatest indictment of African contemporary societies that are saturated with religion, while religious practitioners preach religious values as a cover for their selfish materialism. Almost all characters who show genuine commitment to religious values and ideas are victims of deception or self-deception. The chapter also tries to find out how hypocrisy in organised religion perpetuates the domination and oppression of characters in less privileged positions.

5.2 Hypocrisy and deception

Hypocrisy in organised religion is one of the main concerns in the three narratives under scrutiny. All the societies are shrouded in a veil of deception and self-deception, and characters are shown to embrace religious values which are always contradicted by their actual behaviour.

Kourouma presents a society torn apart by war which is augmented by the warlords. For instance, Papa le Bon is a trained priest who finds himself amidst war. He is taken in as a representative spokesman of the NPFL (National Patriotic Front of Liberia), the movement of Charles Taylor "who wreaks havoc all over the region" (48). Though the religious stance of Taylor is not stated in the text, it is convincing that he consciously takes in Papa le Bon due to

his designation and that he is already popular among the street kids whom he has been giving food to. The narrator tries to bring to light how Papa le Bon exploits the charity relation he has formed with the children. The intention is actually to capture more street kids who will be used as child soldiers. Papa le Bon is caught in this web, giving charity to street kids and deceiving people with the soutane which he wears, a vestment symbolising moral uprightness, "because Papa le Bon is righteousness itself" (76).Yet Papa le Bon has trampled on the rights and bodies of his subjects; he is a religious leader who takes advantages of the ignorance of his followers to achieve his goal, fulfilling his pretended religious duties to maintain his social standing.

Papa le Bon's ridiculous outward appearance deceives and misleads the child soldiers. He covers himself with a motley religious mask as described by the boy narrator:

> Colonel Papa le Bon was shockingly garbed... For a start Colonel Papa le Bon had colonel's stripes. That was on account of the tribal wars. Colonel Papa le Bon was wearing a white soutane, a white soutane tied at the waist with a leather belt, a belt held up by a pair of black leather braces crossed across his back and his chest. Colonel Papa le Bon was wearing a cardinal's mitre. Colonel Papa le Bon was leaning on a pope's staff with a crucifix at the top. Colonel Papa le Bon was carrying a Bible in his left hand. To top it all off, Colonel Papa le Bon was wearing an AK-47 slung over his shoulder. The AK-47 and Colonel Papa le Bon were inseparable; he carried it round with him night and day. That was on account of the tribal wars." (52)

At first the narrator is only able to see how shocking and strange he is, but as he gives more details, he draws the reader to grotesque nature of Papa le Bon's character that reveals him to be a ruthless killer posing as a man of God. He indoctrinates his child soldiers, subjecting them to harsh conditions. Birahima narrates: "Colonel Papa le Bon himself presented me with a kalash and made me lieutenant'' (66). The idea of giving titles to the child soldiers is actually to make them feel elevated but in the real sense he is just manipulating them so that they do the work for him. However, the child soldiers make fun of it all, not fully realising how they have been transformed. For example, Birahima explains that Papa le Bon taught him how to use the AK-47:

"you just pressed the trigger and it went tat-tat-tat and kept killing and killing and all the people would be dropping like flies" (67). Nabutanyi asserts that "the guns and drugs give children a temporary sense of invincibility and power, enabling them not only to commit atrocities, but to talk about them" (2013:74). Psychologically Papa le Bon brainwashes the minds of the child soldiers whose world-view is twisted so that they learn (with the help of drugs) to take pleasure in killing.

Prince Johnson is another character who exposes the hypocrisy of the Church leaders who occupy the religious arena. Prince Johnson presents himself as a churchman who tells the world that he became involved in tribal wars at God's command to kill the devil's men. From the point of view of the narrator Prince Johnson is "a warlord with his head stuffed full of incredible lordly principles" (126-127). He strategically uses his religious beliefs to deceive the other characters. There is a contradiction between who he is and what he advocates. Even the narrator expresses mixed thoughts with regard to Prince Johnson's behaviour: "The craziest thing is that he even puts his principles into practice" (127). This statement points to Prince Johnson's double standards. He is a selfish individual who blinds the people, using religion to gratify his urges. Though he is said to be a churchman, Johnson subjects the small children to inhuman conditions. He takes them to the battle front where others are killed, and like Saint Marie Beatrice he justifies these horrors: "he said that the child soldiers were the Good Lord's children God had given them, God had taken them away. God doesn't always have to be fair. Thanks be to God" (141). The narrator also shows the hypocrisy of Sister Hadja Gabrielle Aminata, armed with an AK-47, whom he describes as being "one-third Muslim, one-third Catholic and one-third animist" (180), a woman who claims to defend the virginity of the girls she keeps yet subjects

them to genital mutilation and, like Papa le Bon and Prince Johnson, makes them into child soldiers.

It might be pointed out here that Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Ngugi wa Mirii in *I Will Marry When I Want* (*Ngaahika Ndeenda*, 1982), also attack religion as instrument of exploitation and impoverishment of the poor. The early Christians in Kenya are shown as hypocrites, holding the Bible in the left hand and the gun in the right, using religion to blindfold the natives:

> "The white man wanted us
> To be drunk with religion
> While he,
> Was mapping and grabbing our land,
> And starting factories and businesses
> On our sweat." (57)

Religion plays the role of a tranquilliser, preoccupying the natives with eschatological meaning and illusory hopes of betterment to ensure that they remain docile. Meanwhile, the religious leaders are busy grabbing land and setting up businesses.

The hypocrisy of Drumont in Beti's narrative is also unveiled in Ekokot village, where there is a habit of selling daughters in the name of marriage. For instance, a woman runs to Drumont hoping to solve the conflict of the fixed bride price for her daughter. The family pegged it at five thousand francs in a guise to 'sell' the daughter for marriage: "A woman appeared before the Father, accused of doing nothing when a young man, who wanted to marry her daughter, was forced to pay out five thousand francs. Five thousand, what a price!" (60). However, instead of speaking out against the practice, Drumont is concerned only with the amount:

> "You could have spoken to your husband. You could have threatened to report him to the Administrator. Don't you know is forbidden for a father to demand five thousand francs for his daughter? Five hundred francs is the most your husband

> can demand of his son-in-law: … And that is the law, made by the administrator…" (61).

The woman's action of rushing to Drumont indicates the trust female characters have in him. It is clear that they take him to be the saviour. However, his response shows that the Church approves of the commodification of daughters. The scenario depicts the Church's approval of the practice. Drumont cannot denounce the practice because ironically it fills the Church's coffers. At the same time Beti also highlights the atrocities committed by Drumont against the natives; people like Zacharia question his actions and his words which, in the name of God and religion, control people's minds and enslave their thoughts.

Father Drumont considers himself to be the embodiment of Christ, telling the native people of Bomba that he and Christ are the same: "the Father assured them that Christ and himself were all one. And since then all the boys of my [Dennis's] village call the Father 'Jesus Christ'" (3). According to the natives of Bomba, there is no difference between Drumont and Jesus. It is obvious he has impersonated Jesus of the Bible, and the plan works well for him as he is accorded the respect of a religious man. However, he presents himself as omnipotent, for instance the manner in which he drags the woman in front of the congregants: "along by her left arm ... before the table and forced her down on her knees" (4). He also chases a woman whose baby is crying: "the church beadle came hastening forward and whispered something in the ear of the baby's mother, waving his cane about the while. The mother took her baby with infinite slowness right down the wall of the nave and out at the west door" (4). This shows how Drumont uses both force and deception to wield complete authority over the native people of Bomba.

In Kourouma's novel the presence of social evils is perpetuated by a dishonest, deceitful discourse designed to create a false consciousness in the minds of the characters. For instance, on Captain Kid's death Papa Le Bon states that:

> "The two young men on the motorbike were possessed by evil spirits and fired on him without warning. The devil had got into them. The captain's soul flew off and we shall mourn him. We could not exorcise the devil from the hearts of every passenger in the convoy or from the minds of the men responsible for the captain's death. It just was not possible. That's why we had to kill some of them, but seeing as God says thou shalt not kill too much, or at least thou shalt kill less, we stopped killing, and left the others just as they came into the world. We left them naked, this is what the lord has said: when people injure you, kill less but leave them naked as they came into the world." (56)

The phrase "thou shalt not kill too much" is comic, twisting the Biblical words to reconcile killing with the commandment "Thou shalt not kill", just as the Stalinist pigs in *Animal Farm* twist the commandment "No animal shall kill any other animal" into: "No animal shall kill any other animal without cause". The position that Papa le Bon finds himself in is contradictory. He is aware that religious tradition does not allow killing, and so, like Orwell's pigs, he chooses to re-interpret and re-phrase the religious teaching in order to resolve the conflict in his own mind and deceive the child soldiers. He further distorts the words uttered by the priest during the burial ceremony. Job 1:21 reads: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there…" (NKJV, 1982; 346), but Papa le Bon twists this sombre meditation on the human condition into a policy of stripping people of their clothes when they are alive! Thus, through his representation of Papa le Bon who violates Bible teachings, Kourouma denounces men who exploit religion for their own personal interests.

The question arises whether it is the religious teachings themselves that lead to social ills, a lack of self-realisation and oppression, or whether it is hypocritical, selfish religious leaders who misinterpret, misquote and distort these sacred teachings for their own ends. Like Kourouma, Mariama Bâ is concerned with the misquoting of sacred scriptures. Her epistolary novel *Une si longue letter* shows how men exploit Islamic teachings to gratify their desires. She reveals the hypocrisy that is established on the ground of religion and tradition. The Imam states:

"There is nothing one can do when Allah the almighty puts two people side by side" (36). Tamsir (Ramatoulaye's brother-in-law) adds: "it is fate that decides men and things: God intended him to have second wife, there is nothing he can do about it" (37). Fatalism permeates almost every aspect of life and culture. Yet whether or not men misinterpret, distort or misquote the scriptures, for Bâthey always use the ideology of Islam and their own interpretation of tradition to exploit, abuse, and degrade women.

5.3 Violence and domination

Allah Is Not Obliged goes beyond the critique that organised religion and the discourse of religious leaders serve, in a hypocritical and deceptive way, to justify inequality and social ills since the novel implicitly connects religion with violence, killing and warfare. It could be argued that in a turbulent war situation such as that in Kourouma's novel, moving with weapons of destruction is a convincing reason to associate religion with violence, especially when Kourouma's narrator, Birahima, says that it is civil wars that make a person take up arms, adding in a fatalistic way: "That's tribal wars for you" (135). Birahima's justification that "it is civil wars that does that", is a lame excuse since men who are true to their spiritual faith can definitely not carry lethal weapons that will negate the peace their religion advocates. Birahima's statement also reveals that he is naive in the sense that his life coach Yacouba seems to be comfortable with the war situation: his hidden agenda is to exploit the financial possibilities that pervade the war zone, not to propagate the spiritual faith. El Hajj Yacouba uses his 'grigri' power to deceive the warlord that he is giving him protection. Throughout the war zone he has introduced himself not as a devout Muslim but as a grigriman or marabout or fortune teller who gives protection against bullets: "I am a grigriman, a grigriman. I can make powerful grigris to protect people

from whistling bullets" (9). El Hajj Yacouba capitalises on the psychology of the warlords to prise money out of them.

Saint Marie-Beatrice is portrayed as a genuine saint in charge of the biggest convent school in the capital. She moves with a Kalash and has Christian grigris and Muslim grigris around her. To top it all, the bishop's palace, which is the highest office in the Church's social structure, sends "ten soldiers and eighteen child-soldiers under the command of a captain to defend the school" (134). Revealing how those in privileged positions use religion to manipulate its followers, the narrator shows the actions of the religious pretenders as a cruel joke in the sense that the position of Bishop is highly revered in the Christian domain and the Bible is the weapon that is used to seek protection. The charlatans' hypocritical manoeuvre in advocating peace and at the same time moving with weapons of destruction is part of the novel's intention to shock with grim, satiric humour, yet beyond the satire there is an insistent link between religion and warfare, a link that makes it seem correct to argue that religion is founded on violence and war; that it "contains the seeds of conflicts", as Wijsen (2007:122) aptly puts it. Kourouma shows in the story that no matter whether they are boys, girls, women, men, politicians, warlords, Muslims or Christians, all of them kill. Is it therefore right to argue, based on this text and others like it, that religion cannot be absolved from the blame of war, and that war itself has been the foundation of some religions?

If we take a look at history, when "the last independent Egyptian dynasty fell to Greek conquest in 332 BCE" (Shellington, 2012:42), the victors destroyed Egyptian gods and replaced them with their own local gods and shrines. Unlike ancient Egyptian and Greek religion, Christianity and Islam claim to be religions of peace, yet in the Crusades Christian soldiers massacred Muslims, in Africa they wiped out traditional African religion, and in the 16th and 17th

centuries Protestants and Catholics killed each other, while the Puritans in England vandalized Catholic churches. Against this backdrop it can be argued that the successful spread of an ascendant religion or religious movement is often helped by a military power that defeats its religious as well as its political enemies.

Father Drumont in *The Poor Christ of Bomba* is seen as a violent character in the way he treats the Sixa women: for instance he beats them in order to make them confess. His use of a military-style method of interrogation makes his evangelical zeal oppressive, exploitative and abusive, as the Sixa women are forced to answer questions by threats and whippings. Marguerite sums up the whole situation "through her sobs" when, bluntly and courageously, she responds to Father Drumont during her interrogation:

> "Fada, you're torturing me unjustly. You must know what goes on here, what's always gone on right here in the mission. You must know that every girl in the Sixa sleeps with someone here or someone from outside. Why are you torturing me like this? Why are prosecuting me? Anyone can tell you these things if you ask them; I'm no more guilty than anyone else." (184)

The action of Father Drumont defeats the whole idea of peace, humility and self-sacrifice that Christianity advocates. The beating he inflicts induces fear in the Sixa women, and even Denis becomes uncertain about the image he has of father Drumont. He is alienated and continues to live in his imagined world after the departure of the white Father. Similarly, in Oyono's *Houseboy* (1965), Father Vandermayer administers punishment to those he considers to have misbehaved:

> He loves to beat the Christians who have committed adultery---native Christians of course. ... He makes them undress in his office while he repeats in bad Ndjem, 'When you were kissing, weren't you ashamed before God?' Sunday after Mass has become a terrible time for everyone who has Father Vandermayer as spiritual director." (15)

Father Vandermayer paves the way for his dominance by inducing fear in his congregants, while Father Drumont has a habit of dragging people. Beti exposes the crudity of an institution that teaches humility and kindness yet in practice does the opposite, as in the case of Sanga Boto who is victimised and humiliated for holding onto his beliefs:

> The Father demanded of the assistant catechist: 'Is this Sanga Boto?' The assistant nodded, and without a moment's hesitation the Father seized this limb of Satan by the arm and dragged him clean out of the house. Sanga Boto made no resistance, but had difficulty in following the Father's breakneck pace and kept stumbling over his slippers. He was terrified and began whining: 'Father, Father, what have I done? Why treat me like this? What have I done? ...'
>
> But the Father pursed his lips and ignored him, pulling him by the hand. He was leaping along with great strides and Sanga Boto came skipping after him. And soon I saw that he had lost his slippers and was finding the path painful to his feet, but the Father just kept blasting along. His lappa began to slip and he grasped it with his free hand, striving to pull the other from the Father's grasp so that he could re-tie it, but the Father hung on like a vice. The lappa fell off and Sanga Boto was dragged shamefully through the village in short cotton drawers. He cried out that he was naked and couldn't enter the village like that, but the Father kept striding on and a crowd of women and children gathered laughing behind us." (74)

The author presents us with a cruel hypocrite who goes by the name of 'Reverend Father'. He is a merchant selling spiritual services to the natives, at the same time humiliating and violently degrading them.

Organised religion in several ways can be the site for the construction of dominance. Religious discourse shapes the emotions and motivations of individuals in a way that allows them to overrule the innate intuition of their biological heritage in favour of the culturally and religiously defined values encoded in the generated language. These are the attitudes and expectations of society as framed by institutions. The innate drives will therefore remain suppressed. For instance the title of Kourouma's novel *Allah is not Obliged* influences most of the characters in that it limits their reasoning. The title defines the characters' world-view; they abstract an image of a god who acts without mercy.

Kourouma's title interpellates its characters in an imagined social world. The characters accept the positions in which they find themselves and end up repressing the real relations between themselves and the actual social structure. All the warlords capitalise on the title to establish themselves as gods in the various political factions. Papa le Bon uses religious dogma to subjugate his fellow men. He locks them up to deprive them of their human rights and imprisons the husbands of the women he decides to make love to (64). He uses religion to invent crimes that do not exist in order to dominate people, and within the prison he enjoys casting out what he considers evil spirits from women, which turns out to be a way of exploiting them. Each woman has to undergo the exorcism ritual: "Colonel Papa le Bon did the casting out ritual himself, one on one for hours and hours" (64). Anyone believed to be possessed by evil spirits is despised by the others, which allows Papa le Bon to build walls around the women and abuse them sexually. His behaviour of dominating all the characters in the story is a manifestation of the patriarchal power at the heart of both the Judaeo-Christian and Islamic religions. Mutunda (2009:76) quotes Accilien saying "religion is an excuse and a weapon used for those with power, mostly males, to maintain the status quo and to do what pleases them." Kourouma shows how religious power is intertwined with patriarchal practices. For Mutunda patriarchy "is a gender system in which men dominate women" (2009:77). It is important to note that this system of social stratification based on sex provides men with power and material advantages while depriving women of both those benefits. Patriarchal ideology, which legitimates the rule of fathers over children and the dominance of men over women, has a religious sanction. Ezeulu, the polygamous patriarch in Umuaro, Father Drumont, the egoist who establishes himself as a god-like ruler in Bomba, Father Higler in Echewa's *The Land's Lord* (1976), who forces his beliefs on the Africans whose roots he is not acquainted with, Father Vandermayer and Papa le

Bon all exert patriarchal power and the will to dominate, tendencies with which the so-called 'patriarchal religions' are often associated.

Kourouma's warlords are obsessed with protecting their egoism. They strategically stage themselves as staunch Christians and Muslims committed to fulfil duties as Church persons in order to remain in control. This is evident in Papa le Bon and Johnson who every morning ostentatiously go to the temple to officiate with altar boys who are child soldiers. These small boys are subjected to harsh military conditions and forced to embrace a religious faith they are not grounded in. Though the temple is a place of sanctity, the narrator shows it is not worthy to be called a temple because it acts as a venue for a number of evil activities. The temple also turns out to be a court: "the temple was also the court house on account of how the accused had to swear by God and grigris." (69). The whole idea of swearing is a mere joke as it is a mechanism that has been used to disempower the congregants and also swearing by grigris does not make sense. It cannot be disputed that the author tries to show how the religious leaders flog the followers in order to induce fear in them so that they remain in control. The narrator is confused with the evil activities taking place in the so-called temple because initially he is told that it is a place for prayers. All the characters who go to the temple are caught in a web of religious indoctrination; they are psychologically displaced and cannot think realistically.

5.4 Religion as a conduit for material gain

The three novels under discussion show that the institution of organised religion legitimates the wealth, power and privilege of the dominant class by making their position appear divinely ordained. People are made to believe that a leader is God's representative on earth and is owed total obedience to God's authority. From the acts of the religious leaders, it can be argued that oppression is structural and its causes seem to be rooted in unquestioned norms,

habits, and symbols. However, Young (2014: 6) convincingly argues that "while structural oppression involves relations among groups, these relations do not always fit the paradigm of conscious and intentional oppression of one group by another." Yet what comes to light in this study is that religion, far from bringing progressive change, merely legitimises social inequality while claiming to bring about the New Jerusalem. In this sense it deceives and disempowers its dominated, interpellated believers, it sanctions existing power relations and, at least in these novels, it reinforces the rule of patriarchs, con men, pretenders, egoists, materialists and bullies.

In *Allah Is Not Obliged* Kourouma presents the reader with a society that is obsessed with material wealth, one in which religion becomes a conduit for material gain. All the warlords are desperately in search of money either to sustain their physical being or for some other reason. The author places them in a war-torn society to see if they can serve according to their religious conviction. However, they all act to satisfy their physical needs. They are the perpetrators of all the ills in society. All kill, steal, corrupt people and are involved in immoral activities. Papa le Bon presents himself as a committed Christian, but he "collected duties and taxes and put them in the pocket of his soutane" (70). He uses religion to amass wealth; all is done for quick material gain.

The title of El Hajj is highly respected: "a person who gets to be a big somebody is also called a hajji, because every year they go to Mecca and over there in the desert they slit a sheep's throat during the big Muslim feast called *la fête des moutons* that is also called *el-kabeir*" (30). Yacouba is given roles that point to his thirst for money. He comes on the scene when Birahima makes a journey in search of his aunt. The narrator tells us that Yacouba practised the business of money multiplying before his visit to Mecca. His pilgrimage to Mecca concretises his religious image, yet he is obsessed with wealth and shows no sign of being a devout Muslim. He portrays

himself as a bourgeois, and uses malicious ways to gather as much wealth as he can, leaving no stone unturned. Just like Papa le Bon who is described as "the number one rooster in the hen house" (74), Yacouba adds women to the list of his possessions whom he abuses sexually.

The Muslim Malinke elders choose El hajj Yacouba to escort Birahima with the view that he will impart Islamic values to the young boy whom they want to become a devout Muslim, yet Yacouba has already said he is going to a war zone to profit from the politics that have wreaked havoc in the two countries. He does not hesitate because he is on the mission to amass wealth. The author shows that war itself becomes a tool used to fulfil one's needs, and for Yacouba this war profiteering seems to be a perfect deal. He is not interested in the peace that religion advocates, and therefore takes every opportunity to exploit people. As the story ends, the narrator confirms that with all the atrocities surrounding them, Yacouba and his friend Sekou manage to gain the wealth they had gone for in the war zone. The protagonist confirms that he saw Yacouba "having so many, so many bags of gold and diamonds in the folds of his pants" (200). All these warlords and grigris-men operate on Freud's pleasure principle; they are materially thirsty and want rapid progress in acquiring wealth.

Likewise, Father Drumont's method of soliciting confession and conversion seems to be a way of swindling money out of the natives. In Christianity confession focuses on the sinful act one has committed. Contrary to this, Drumont forces Church members to pay dues to confess their sins. No confession is given without paying Church dues. The confession scenario exemplifies how father Drumont fattens his pockets. The narrator refers to the issue of unmarried mothers: "after all, don't all the unmarried Christian girls bring their babies for baptism, paying a special fee fixed by the Father himself? Isn't that an extra source of money for the mission coffers?" (9). Drumont exploits and corrupts the natives. For example, in Bitie village, though

men send their wives to the Sixa house, they immediately take other women as second wives: "for with all the money they're making from cocoa a second wife is almost inevitable" (40). The issue of taking a second wife is an indication of a man's success in the society. The practice works well for Drumont because he knows that the native men are obsessed with polygamy. The prevalence of many polygamous families in society implies that the Church will have more money. Denis states that, "at the very altar and in the midst of the service, they are already thinking about their next choice, have already negotiated with the parents and paid part of the bride-price" (40). One of the great ironies in the novel is that the Church which preaches monogamy benefits from these marriages in that children from the second wives pay higher dues before they are baptised than those from non-polygamous homes: "And they do usually send their extra children for baptism, paying a higher fee than the good Christians" (40).

Churches typically make people relinquish their right to property, advising them to give more to God (i.e. the clergy) while the leaders are busy fattening their pockets. Even in *Arrow of God* we see Ezeulu advising Umuaroans to sacrifice the best of their harvest to Ulu, but in the real sense he is the one who is benefiting from whatever Umuaro is giving:

> "In the Chief Priest's compound nobody could think of indulging in the many old and new evasions which allowed others to eat an occasional new yam be it local or foreign. Because they were more prosperous than most families they had a larger stock of old yams." (219)

Here also the narrative voice draws attention to the importance of 'title' and the acquisition of material wealth that Umuaro exalts. Probing into history, we learn that Ezeulu has risen from a low status:

> But Nwaka had carried the day. He was one of the three people in all the six villages who had taken the highest title in the land, Eru, which was called after the lord of wealth himself. Nwaka came from a long line of prosperous men and from a village which called itself first in Umuaro. They said that when the six villages first came together they offered the priesthood of Ulu to the weakest among them to ensure that none in the alliance became too powerful. (16)

Thus Ezeulu's appointment as Ulu's chief priest connects with the idea of gaining material wealth. The fears of Umuaro came true because the narrator presents Ezeulu as a prosperous man with absolute power. Ezeulu is therefore able to make use of his religious position for his own personal advancement; he becomes more prosperous by exploiting the ignorance of the natives. While the appearance of the new Church makes a change in the way the people are exploited, the new Church in feudal style asks the natives to take as much of their harvest as they can to the true God. Initially, the new Church does not find proselytising an easy task. However, it intervenes at a time when Umuaro is vulnerable and needs a saviour: "Now Mr Goodcountry saw in the present crisis over the New Yam Feast an opportunity for fruitful intervention" (216). The new Church capitalises on the idea that the six villages of Umuaro cannot act outside the dictates of their god Ulu, they cannot eat the new yam unless it is graced by god Ulu, so it is the religious stance of the people of Umuaro that allows the new Church to chip in easily, taking advantage of the crisis to sweep up people's resources.And with emphasis, Mr Goodcountry says:

> "that is what I say. But not just one yam. Let them bring as many as they wish according to the benefits they received this year from Almighty God. And not only yams, any crop whatsoever or livestock or money. Anything" (216).

It is shown that Umuaro finds new hope in the new religion. Its captivating outlook blinds people in the sense that it begins to exploit them more.

Religion really "has presented a poisoned chalice to followers who get committed to its cause," as Akinfenwa et al. (2014:9) put it.Religion acts as the bane of the people's suffering. Gicaamba in *I Will Marry When I Want* (1982) says that religion is not the same thing as God:

> "Religion is the alcohol of the soul!
> Religion is the poison of the mind!
> It's not God who has brought about our poverty!" (61).

Gicaamba's concern is how religion has been used to exploit the natives. The religious leaders grab the land and the people are made to work hard for long hours but they do not benefit from their labour. This also applies to *The Poor Christ of Bomba,* where Beti deplores the misery, exploitation and oppression of the young women caged in the "Sixa." Catherine, Monique, Marguerite, Anaba and many others are mercilessly exploited by the Church and its native male agents. The Sixa is under the total control of Raphael, the mission's appointed leader. During interrogation of some of the women in the Sixa, it is mentioned that they have no choice other than to follow Raphael's directives. Through Father Drumont, Beti denounces the forced labour of so-called developmental projects carried out by administrators in Cameroon. Monsieur Vidal the administrator brings to light the tactic of the Christian Church, which is nothing other than forced labour: "You say to them: 'Go and work at the mission. or you'll all go to Hell.' Is that not a worse constraint than any earthly one?" (36). To recall the quotation from Marx that "in the earliest times the principal production (for example, the building of temples, etc., in Egypt, India and Mexico) appears to be in the service of the gods, and the product belongs to the gods", Drumont uses the women to construct the mission itself:

> All the bricks and tiles were made by the Sixa girls. Every week he called up some of the village Christians to hel But despite that there still wasn't enough manpower. So He put a girl from the Sixa to work wherever a man was missing, and proved to our people that girls can do jobs that no one had ever dreamt of, like sawing wood into planks (16).

It is also worth noting that Drumont perpetuates the exploitation of the Sixa women as he extends the period of stay in the Sixa from three months to four months with a view to maintaining the labour force. Drumont further composes a work song to brainwash the women in order to make them believe that the work is a demonstration of their inner character:

> "Work with a will,
> Then strive harder still.

And never give up,
But work till you drop" (14).

The work song proves to be one of the manoeuvres devised by Father Drumont to enhance his economic status. The women are deprived of the fruits of their own labour as they do not derive any benefit from the work they do for the Church.

Kourouma's Prince Johnson's self-given divine duties seem to perpetuate violence; his hidden motive is to amass wealth. He even harasses Saint Marie Beatrice who is in charge of a convent school, believing that she is keeping dollars. Although the child soldiers are fending for Prince Johnson, he starves them; they go for days empty stomachs. Prince Johnson separates these children from their own labour. In order to sustain their physical being, they venture into activities such as pilfering which they believe is justified by all the religions of the warlords they have worked under: "We pilfered food. Pilfering food isn't stealing because Allah, Allah in his ordinate goodness, never intended to leave empty for two whole days a mouth he created." (129) In this way 'Allah' is sublimated as an unattainably divine goodness and love that condemns the evil of ordinary mortals who act in his name.

The child soldiers in the novel epitomise the average worker in the sense that they are unskilled labourers attempting to survive in a harsh economic climate. Strauss (1991:42) states that "religion and social structure are in a harmonic relationship; as far as the status of individuals is concerned, they duplicate each other." This implies that even in religion the idea of class division is inevitable, and the less privileged are at the economic base, so the child soldiers' plight devalues the ideological superstructure religion validates. The novel highlights the tough living conditions the less privileged sections of the population are subjected to in order to increase the wealth of the religious charlatans. Finally, Beti's narrator Denis also manifests a concern for the material side of things: "and we need so many things – an organ for the new

Church, a tractor for ploughing our fields, a generator for electric light, a motor-car, and so forth" (9). This indicates that there is a change in his thinking, a realisation in the mind of the narrator that he has been initiated into a society which values material things above spiritual aspirations.Denis provides services to father Drumont for which he is not paid. He is also psychologically estranged from his work as he does not see the fruits of his labour.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the acts of the religious practitioners in the primary texts. It has established that there is an inconsistency between what they advocate and what they do; they are play-actors. It has also highlighted how authors unveil the masks of hypocrisy. Religion creates platforms for oppression. The next chapter will discuss the summary of the findings in the three selected narratives.

CHAPTER SIX

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings of the study in relation to the objectives and research questions set out in Chapter One. It concludes the discussion on the way Achebe, Beti and Kourouma explore religion in their works, *Arrow of God*, *The Poor Christ of Bomba* and *Allah Is Not Obliged*, respectively. It summarises the major points that have been raised and discussed. How the three writers represent religion as tool of oppression in their works is also discussed.

The study followed a thematic approach in the analysis of religion used as a weapon of oppression. In order to identify and investigate the traces of religious oppression, I did a careful examination of the primary texts. This provided an avenue to critically identify experiences and themes that related to the aim. The objectives were to establish how the characters are shown to be tied to religion psychologically, to illustrate how religion as a human agency necessitates domination, and to examine the effects of religion on both the oppressed and the oppressors in the three selected texts. The research tried to analyse various elements that would constitute a critical understanding of the correlation of religion to oppression in African society as presented by the authors.

6.2 *Arrow of God*

Arrow of God demonstrates the pervasiveness of materialism. Suffice to say that the coexistence of the spiritual and material world prompts the author to explore the idea of power and leadership in Umuaro, how the whole community suffers due to a patriarchal, egocentric religious leader's abuse of power. Achebe does this by building arguments and rhetoric around the life and roles of Ezeulu, the chief priest of the deity Ulu, a god created by the people of

Umuaro at a time of crisis. Ezeulu claims to have more insights than ordinary human beings as revelations are made to him through dreams and visions. He says: "I can see things where other men are blind. That is why I am known and at the same time unknowable. You cannot know that thing which beats the drum to which Ezeulu dances" (123). The duality of Ezeulu's nature gives him the platform to trick and exploit the people of Umuaro based on the illusory power of a man-made mound of earth called Ulu. Yet he himself is psychologically bound to religion in the sense that he has to live his life up to the standards set by his society.

From the narrative, it is noted that Achebe represents religion even handed. This is in line with Udofia (2014:113) who quotes Achebe in the essay, 'The Role of the Writer in a New Nation', saying that: "we cannot pretend that our past was one long technicolour idyll' but that like other people's pasts, it had its 'good as well as its bad sides." However, this study concentrated on the part where he shows the flaws of the native religion and the new religion.

6.3 *The Poor Christ of Bomba*

The Poor Christ of Bomba explores the harsh experiences of a colonised people where religion is a conduit of material gain for the colonisers and an instrument of oppression for the colonised. One point clearly enounced in this novel is that oppression is internalised, so that people like the women in the Sixa house eventually oppress themselves. Father Drumont indoctrinates Denis, the Father's boy who internalises the religious teachings and is afraid to act contrary to what he has acquired. He does not live an authentic life, is brainwashed, unable to think for himself, and as a tool of the oppressor he is alienated and can no longer function on the same level as that of his people. Religion creates platforms for deceit, intolerance and violent exploitation, such as the Sixa house. Meanwhile people are duped by men such as Sanga Boto:

> "Men like Sanga Boto are really dangerous. They descend on a population full of superstition and naïvety, and then bamboozle them with a lot of trickery and mystification. Then they are ready to start exploiting them" (69).

Sango Boto openly acknowledges that he has been practicing magic to deceive people: "he admitted everything: his mirror that was just like any other; the tricks he used to impress people and the stupid questions he asked them" (76). From his confession, the author highlights the hypocrisy embedded in religion, showing how Sango Boto uses religion to amass wealth.

To sum up, it has been noted that the characters in Beti's novel do not feel estranged as they are a self-satisfied consciousness which understands and accepts the world as its world. The victims of oppression often internalize their oppression and eventually oppress themselves. Suffice to say that Beti represent organized religions negatively, his work demonstrated that he views religion as venom that destroys the wholeness of a person.

6.4 *Allah Is Not Obliged*

In *Allah Is Not Obliged* religion is used even more blatantly as a means to acquire wealth. The religious ideas generated by those in privileged positions melt into ideological constructs. The statement in the title is used to justify a horribly cruel, unjust status quo. The ordinary characters do not have a voice, internalising oppressive religious teachings that give false hope and which they cannot question under any circumstance because they are put forward as divine revelations. The research found that although religious beliefs are associated with hope for a just world, their effect is to reconcile characters such as Maman to their suffering, believing that if they live in a manner that is consistent with religious prescriptions they will inherit the kingdom of the God in the next life. Such teachings mentally enslave characters who resort to work under religious duress. The research has also found that there is another narrative voice hidden behind that of the child-soldier narrator whose literary duty is to unveil the masks of hypocrisy,

irrationalism, greed and selfishness worn by religious leaders. The research further established that the characterisation of the warlord in Kourouma's setting shows that the author strongly denounces religion. For him organised religions do not give people the real happiness, instead it is a weapon used to diminishes their lives.

6.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, some traces of religious experiences of the characters were analysed and they demonstrated that religious teachings mentally enslave characters who resort to work under religious duress. The characters do not have a voice, internalising oppressive religious teachings that give false hope. The acts of those in privileged positions were also analysed and showed that they are play-actors; they are using religion to maintain their social standing. Organised religion legitimates the wealth, power and privilege of the dominant class by making their position appear divinely ordained. The authors unveil the masks of hypocrisy embedded in the acts of those in privileged position. Religion affects characters by objectifying them; characters do not live an authentic life as they are alienated from the realities of life. The findings have shown that the three authors highlight that when used as a tool, religion plays a bigger role in oppressing others in society. It was also observed that the Psychoanalysis and the Marxist theories are both useful in determining experiences that could constitute traces of oppression.

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