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**Configuration of Faith System in Postcolonial Africa: A Critical Analysis of Selected Plays of Ahmed Yerima**

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**Abstract**

The devastating effects colonialism/imperialism has on African culture linger on in diverse and disguised forms till today. Since the incursion of the white colonialists and Arab imperialists who introduced Christianity and Islam respectively into Africa, African belief system has assumed a new form. What most African communities currently practise as a religion is more of a fusion of African traditional religion and alien faiths – predominantly Christianity and Islam. This paper, therefore, aims to critically examine the influence of colonialism/imperialism on the faith system in Africa. Thus, Postcolonial theory was adopted to study five selected texts of Ahmed Yerima. The conflict of faiths which characterizes the religious practice of most African adherents of Christianity and Islam was carefully x-rayed. Consequently, it was discovered that modern African belief system is largely adulterated and that African converts are ‘unhomely’ in their

old and new religions. It is therefore concluded that alien religions are not superior to the condemned African traditional religion.

**Keywords:** colonialism, imperialism, faith system, Postcolonial, conflict, unhomely.

**Introduction**

Colonialism succeeded in eroding almost all the pre-colonial past of the colonized people. In Africa, for instance, the colonizers depicted the people’s mind, during the pre-colonial era, as a sort of “tabula rasa” i.e. an empty slate devoid of any meaningful thoughts and practices. During this pre-colonial era, the land itself was said to have been a political and cultural desert inhabited by savages and barbarians. “Before colonization, the colonizers claimed, native peoples lived barbarically, without any systems of government, religion, or rational customs”

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(Tyson, 2006, p. 423). The colonizers weaned the colonized of the positive aspects of their pre-colonial history, a history which the former cursorily described as nonexistence. The resultant effect of this ugly trend is the birth of Eurocentric language – pre-historic Africa, referring to the period when Africa had no written record of its own history. This Eurocentric consideration belies origin of writing, which is traced to Africa, Egypt specifically. All this forms the basis of colonialist ideology and, in turn, the incursion of a hegemonic (Western) culture.

Postcolonialism “...refers to literature of colonized cultures by the British Empire” (Bressler, 2003, p. 201) and “... usually excludes literature that represents either British or American viewpoints...” (Bressler, 2003, p. 199). In other words, postcolonialism is a literary attempt to project the worldviews of the colonized people and quash the superiority of a hegemonic Western culture. The fact remains that without colonization, there could have never been postcolonialism. It is a theory based on a clash of identities/cultures and the reaction of the formerly colonized (critics, writers, theorists, etc.) to this conquering culture. It must be emphasised that although the colonialists left the lands they colonized, they left behind a strong and equally demoralizing ideology: cultural colonization. Since “It was common for the

colonizers to justify their oftentimes cruel treatments of the colonized by invoking European religious beliefs” (Bressler, 2003, p. 200), postcolonialism seeks to impede the persistent effects of such colonialist ideology.

The most significant colonial religious belief system the effects of which are still being felt among African converts today is Christianity. Christianity as a religion crept into Africa during European imperialism and it served as one of the fundamental means of validating colonialism. Being a colonial tool, Christianity was exploited by the colonialist to suppress and/or eradicate the supposed “heathen ways” of the colonized (Bressler, 2003). Prior to the incursion of the colonialists/imperialists into Africa, Africans were arguably a spiritually active/devoted set of people, though the former tried hard to obliterate this pre-colonial past. In African cosmogony, the hierarchy of beings goes: God/Supreme Being, gods, ancestors, man, animals, plants (Oso, 1978, p. 38). So, the notion of influence of the superior beings on the lesser ones markedly subsisted till the advent of the imperialists-cum-missionaries who fervently preached renunciation of indigenous for their alien religion. Their stance was that the former was barbaric and fetish.

In a nutshell, it must be reiterated here that by ‘foreign religions’, we intend

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to imply Christianity and Islam. Before the advent of the white colonialists who persuaded most Africans to give up their traditional religion for Christianity, Arab imperialists had long introduced Islam to different parts of Africa. The introduction of Islam to Africa, particularly the West and the East, came as a result of economic, political and cultural interactions between Arabs and Africans. The economic transaction had barely thrived when the European imperialists and the colonialists came to Africa. Hence, the European powers were able to nip the Arab Islamic empire in the bud in Africa (Akinsanya, 2010, p. 7). However, the cultural contacts which evolved from Afro-Arab trade were not holistically supplanted by European colonialism. The little success enjoyed by Islamic empire in Africa, as observed by Karsh (cited in Daniel, 2006, p. 63), was not unconnected with Islam's favourable attitude to merchandise and cognizance of Africa as one of the lucrative territories of foreign trade. In his perusal of Arab imperialism, Shaikh (1998) avers that any territory Islam touches, be it by sword, migration or propaganda, all converts have to dutifully subscribe to the Arab cultural hegemony, accept Islamic law, acquire Arab manners and its language, develop affection for Mecca and Arab, and accept Muhammad as the model.

The fallout of this incursion of Islam and Christianity into Africa is that

most of the converts suffer from unhomeliness - a situation whereby one is caught between two cultures and one belongs to neither. This is a manifestation of psychological limbo occasioned by individual psychic distress and cultural displacement. This concisely illuminates what Homi Bhabha and others regard as unhomeliness (Tyson, 2006, p. 421). The fact that they had been deeply rooted in traditional religion before their conversion makes it extremely difficult for them to holistically renounce some of its practices. Hence, they are caught up between traditional religion and foreign religions. That is, they are not fully resident in the newly adopted religions nor utterly alienated from the old one – they become psychological refugees. By implication, they are beset by religious conflict. Right from imperialistic age till date, most Africans, including Nigerians, still experience this problem. Yerima therefore constantly writes to unveil this in most of his works.

**Conflict of Faiths: The Fallout of Unhomeliness**

...although a larger percentage of the indigenous population are (sic) converts to Christianity and Islam, it is the indigenous beliefs and values which, mainly, serve as the mediation for their religious and cultural expressions. (Acquah, 2011, p. 4)

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Colonialism/imperialism did not only change the traditional political systems of the African communities, but it also did massively and drastically alter the religious cosmetic of the people. In the words of Affiah and Osuagwu (2012), “Christianity and colonization came with Western education. Western education became, for a long time, the tool for colonizing the African mind and memory” (p. 7). Since the colonial period, the mind of the African man has been put in a delicate dilemma of faiths – he now consciously or unconsciously shuttles between the doctrines of two or more religions while claiming to be a member of just one. Be he a Christian or a Muslim, the African man still refers to, and practises, cogent tenets of the African traditional religion; however his fanaticism in the ‘new’ religion, he is always caught in the conflict between the ‘new’ and the ‘old’ religious tenets.

In *Akuabata* for instance, Olanma, who by choice is a Christian faithful, has to propitiate Iyieke, the god of Ayandoro family, to ward off any punishment that might follow her husband’s rudeness to the god:

Olanma: Jesu Kristi, forgive me. I must do this for my husband’s life. (She places the calabash by the shrine). Now, Iyieke, drink and leave us alone. For your handiwork begins to manifest itself, making

senseless things appear normal even to princes. (p. 42)

The above excerpt affirms that Olanma, like most of the converts, still harbours some belief in the power of gods to either make or mar things. Thus, Olanma’s reserved renunciation of African traditional religion underscores what Bhabha Homi and other postcolonial scholars call “unhomeliness”. Her unhomeliness later manifests when she turns to Jesus, her belief in Iyieke’s power notwithstanding, to help rid the family of the plague believably unleashed by Iyieke: "It is a pity that gods control too much of our lives... But tonight, I shall call on my God, Jesu Kristi. He will send the miracle that will break this yoke of Bondage" (p. 50).

It is crystal-clear that the belief in gods’ influence on man etches on Olanma’s mind. Her new faith seems to have superiorly suppressed the old but it resurfaces in critical moments and she flounders between the two religions. A similar case is presented in Yerima’s *Heart of Stone*. Patu is from a predominantly Muslim lineage, but the unending reappearance of her dead daughter, Seluma, in her dreams informs her decision to look for an interpretation and prayer beyond the confines of her religion of Islam. Patu interprets the dreams to mean that evils are looming over her dead daughter’s son, Musa, and a solution must be sought to avert them. It is by so doing that her

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daughter can rest in the land of the dead. She therefore consults Achief, the “eldest man in the family” to know “If there is something to be done beyond (Muslim) prayers ... an atonement to appease the soul of my late daughter” (p. 10). Patu could be said to be “unhomely” because of her purposeful shuttle between Islam and African traditional religion for a solution to her problem.

Achief is also a Muslim, yet he has the responsibility – as the eldest member of the family – to connect the living with the dead. His ‘five daily prayers’ have not taken this duty away from him. A lot of debate surrounds calling this familial duty of communicating with the dead or ancestors ‘ancestor worship’ or ‘ancestor veneration’ (Afeke & Verster, 2004, p. 48). For scholars like Mbiti and Dopamu, ‘ancestor worship’ is a mere western misconception (Abiodun, 2006). All the same, the debate on naming the traditional practice poses no qualms for the traditional African man. Ironically, Achief who later claims: “I take a new wife to complete the number Allah approved for me as a good Muslim” (p. 13) also agrees that “Part of my task as the oldest man is to take messages of the living to the dead” (p. 12). This task, however, is not characteristic of his acclaimed religion of Islam, but deeply rooted in the African traditional religion.

Yerima also relays a preponderance of conflicting religious faiths in *Agudua*. The eponymous protagonist exhibits a similar alloyed belief when Abore, a chief from the host community, asks about Ibeku, a powerful and wicked leader of Ijebu-Jesha. Agudua’s faith in Christianity is revealed through his response: “Yes. He insists they address him as their Lord and Saviour. There is only one Lord and Saviour to us and He lives in Heaven” (p. 42). But in spite of the fact that Agudua has taken up Christianity as his new religion, he still finds it hard to utterly relinquish the dictates of the traditional religion. His alloyed faith is discernible in his consent to carry a sacrifice to the big forest for peace to return to the land.

His decision to carry the sacrifice makes it glaring that Agudua has dual faith. His new faith in Christianity does not totally preclude his participation in ritual exercise. His preaching of submission to “the true God” contrasts with his role of carrying a sacrifice to gods in the big forest. The belief that the true God could only be found in Christianity as proclaimed by Agudua in the circumstance does not repudiate his belief in power of gods, and interplay between man and gods in Africa. His conversion to Christianity is, inter alia, informed by portrayal of the religion as a superior faith to his indigenous religion by the missionaries whom he has had contact with.

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Also, in his *The Sick People*, Yerima presents a predominantly Christian family whose personal way of life undergirds their addictive romance with traditional religious beliefs. Onirhode, the grandma, serves as the custodian of the family's traditional beliefs. She invites the Olokun priestess, Nene, in order to cleanse her daughter, Mama Icodi, of the sin of adulteration. Mama Icodi herself, as the leader of the Angels of Mary in the Catholic Church, does not really object to the cleansing because she believes it is only with that traditional rite she could atone for her sin. The cult of ancestors revolves around the prayer Onirhode does for Mama Icodi:

ONIRHODE: By the spirit of the Oguegbe family. I place my hand on your head and I bless you. You shall live long. I call on my mother, Adanorishewo, not to sleep, but to watch over you. As your husband returns tomorrow, may the joy of Oghene bless him. (p. 21)

It is important to mention here that being Christians does not make all the family members abandon the traditional religious tenets. Not only do they believe in the superhuman powers of their ancestors as exemplified by Onirhode and Baba Icodi, they also pray to their gods, seeming totally oblivious of their Christian/Catholic doctrine.

**Double Consciousness: An Impetus to Faith Renunciation**

Double consciousness, as a literary term, is ascribed to W. E. B. DuBois in 1903 (Tyson, 2006, p. 448). It implies a state of critical awareness or a way of looking at the world that is divided between indigenous and alien cultures - the colonized's and the colonizer's cultures (Tyson, 2006). The clash of European/Arab and African cultures results in dual consciousness for most of Africans right from the colonial/imperialist era till date. Many a time, Yerima writes to unearth faith renunciation of African people as driven by unhealthy contact with foreign cultures. Having imbibed African culture from childhood, most African converts do respect its social and psychological demands out of nationalism. Exposure of African people to foreign cultures implies gaining access to an alternative way of life. Invariably, availability and influence of another culture tends to undermine their state of nationalism, especially as the former appears to pose an onerous task. Allure of an alternative culture more often than not results in abdication of the former. This therefore explains the perpetual and curious drive for faith renunciation among African traditional religion adherents. Yerima dwells on this concept in most of his works.

In *Akuabata*, Olanma is born into the family of Ayandoro as an adherent of

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traditional religion, but she reverts to Christianity consequent upon her discovery of a serious bondage Ayandoro descents are under Iyieke (the god of the family). She wants freedom; she believes she could only get it if from Christianity. This implies that she could not stand the test of demands of traditional religion anymore. Hence, the need to seek solace in an alternative religion becomes crucial. This move then explains why her faith in Christianity too is not well-grounded. So, her double consciousness facilitates her faith renunciation. Yerima subtly unfolds this through Olanma's persistent complaint that "It is a pity that gods control too much of our lives, so that we all become trapped in the reality of our needs"(p. 50). To affirm that she only seeks solace in Christianity, that her faith in it is not firm either, she blurts out of frustration when her problem still persists: "Olanma, which type of head did you choose? Why is your Jesus asleep that Iyieke has run us all mad?" (p. 63)

Considering Obiageli's case, her faith renunciation is a sharp contrast to Olanma's. While her mother, Olanma, renounces her faith to seek solace in Christianity, Obiageli chooses to abdicate it. On the one hand, her mother imposes the religion on her; she realizes life is not a bed of roses in Christianity too on the other hand. She is quite aware of social and psychological needs of a husband and children but the religious constraint makes her life unfulfilled. And African culture

places high premium on love, marriage, and child bearing. Therefore, for Obiageli, African culture is preferable. Her double consciousness in this wise, equally, precipitates her faith renunciation. This becomes clear in the conversation between Olanma and Obiageli:

Olanma: That is what I am trying to say. Jesu Kristi is real... and now you cannot see Him?

Obiageli: I can see Him. He dies there on the cross, but I cannot feel him. When others hear the voices of Angels at the Convent, I hear the voices of men... children crying out my name. Stretching out their hands so that I can carry them. (p. 64)

Obviously, faith renunciation demonstrated by Olanma and Obiageli underscores double consciousness, engendered by colonization, as an impetus to preponderant cases of unstable belief system in Africa. It is a mainstream development occasioned by a clash of cultures. However, renunciation of the traditional religion for Christianity seems prevalent. This, Yerima further exposes in *Agudua*, *Owiwi*, etc. In *Agudua*, the eponymous protagonist, Agudua, demonstrates a similar case. There is no gainsaying that Agudua believes in the influence of gods and other forces in man's life. His faith abdication gets influenced by double consciousness of African and

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European cultures. Having lived with white missionaries throughout his childhood in Abeokuta where he was rechristened David, Agudua spends the later period of his life with his people. Agudua believes in power of the unseen forces as agents capable of peace restoration. He is aware of human sacrifice as an atonement to curry gods' favour – a traditional religious practice, but he has preference for Christian doctrine that disabuses man's need of human sacrifice after Jesus' messianic role on earth. The rebirth of Agudua's spiritual essence is aptly captured when he states that humanity must only strive to go to heaven.

It is not unclear that Agudua's stance is borne out of juxtaposition of the two religions and/or cultures. His awareness of Ibeku's atrocities in the land, coupled with the resolve of the clan to sacrifice him and a two-day old baby to gods, precipitated his faith renunciation. His dual consciousness of the demands of the two cultures, socially and psychologically, enhances his recourse to choosing Christianity, which he perceives to be less complex and demanding, over African traditional religion. For him, human sacrifice is not as rewarding in building the nation or changing the poor state of the nation. Hence, double consciousness of Agudua quickens his choice of Christianity as a viable alternative: "Light versus darkness. No. Hope versus despair. Never. He has given me renewed strength. A new

beginning...to meet the challenges of life"(p. 63). After the rebirth of his spiritual essence, Agudua sees Christianity and African traditional religion as light versus darkness and/or hope versus despair respectively. A viewpoint informed by Eurocentricism. His renunciation of African traditional religion for Christianity, as he perceives, seems a beginning of new life whose spiritual essence is sufficient to resolve all challenges.

In the same vein, Adunni's experience of double consciousness could be traced to different religions practised by her mother and surrogate father. She is initiated into an occult world by her mother while her surrogate father initiates her into Christianity. She grows up to know the demands of these two different worlds. In comparison of the two, she perceives the demands of the occult world as expensive prices. For instance, in exchange for wisdom, the cult demands her wombs; for protection and prosperity of the family, the cult demands the life of Adunni's father. The other world, as she perceives, does not require paying any price to get salvation. Adunni sees the former as evil and the latter as good. Having been caught between the two diverse worlds, her conception of the two is metaphorically portrayed by Yerima: "My repeated dream... the white dove pecking and killing off the owl. Sometimes, I feel choked... the two birds at war within me" (p. 125).

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Metaphorically, the owl represents the occult world while the white dove stands for Christianity. The owl is ugly and possesses such a repulsive sight, and is usually attached to ominous signs. The white dove looks attractive, calm and is always attached to a peaceful sign. Thus, the owl represents African religion while the dove represents European religion (Christianity). The pecking and killing of the owl by the dove affirms the aggressive and cunning moves, violent and deadly attacks of indigenous culture by the colonialists. This conception is undoubtedly borne out of Eurocentrism that accompanies the white man's religion (Christianity). So, Adunni keeps battling psychological conflict resulting from a clash of two cultures. Her choice of foreign religion over African is informed by the access to an alternative faith, especially as the indigenous faith system seems too complex and extremely demanding for her. As typical of all African people who have double consciousness, Adunni renounces African religion for Christianity. Thus, the attack of the owl (traditional faith) by the dove (Christianity) finally results in the death of the former. Consequently, Christianity has come to submerge and eliminate African traditional religion.

**Religious Scapegoatism/Messianism.**

Part of the strategies exploited by the imperialists cum missionaries is vilification of African traditional religion.

So, its portrayal as fetish, barbaric, cruel, evil and sacrilegious etc. is basically meant to decry it so as to glorify Christianity. The claims that the blood of Jesus has cleansed the world of all sins, that no one else needs to die for the sins of the others, that Christianity neither harms nor destroys like African traditional religion, etc. are debunked by the author, Yerima. He digs up religious scapegoatism in both African traditional religion and Christianity.

In *Akuabata*, Yerima unveils scapegoatism/messianism through Olanma and her daughter, Obiageli of Ayandoro family. When the early members of the family are dying of a mysterious disease, the forebears make covenant with Iyieke, the god of the family. He promises to rescue them on the grounds that he would be given a girl as *Akuabata*. This means the girl would be ordained as the messiah of the family by him (Iyieke). Sacrifice would be given to the god through her on regular basis. However, she would not get married but she could have children, especially males, in replacement of boys who have died. Then, Olanma is the chosen *Akuabata* but her choice of lifestyle differs from what the family made of her. Without her consent, she is made *Akuabata* at childhood age. On the contrary, she has faith in Christianity as a full grownup woman.

Consequently, Iyieke, the god of the family, becomes totally neglected. Iyieke

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thereby chooses to revenge by striking some family members dead, afflicting some with illness. Yerima clearly captures it thus.

IYIEKE: ...Me! Neglected, I have come to take my revenge... First, after the covenant with their fathers, to worship me, they turn their backs and leave my shrine to the saliva of lizards, and the hungry house rats. Me! I shall avenge. Let their new god save them. Death shall take them, and for each soul taken, I get renewed libation...a practice they had long forgotten. (p. 11)

Olanma is made a scapegoat not only because her life is, without her consent, used for bargain but also because she is instructed to ditch her husband of thirty years, rededicate her life to the god, and simply revert to her old religion. Worst still, under the spell of Iyieke, both Olanma and her husband become ill, until her daughter gives up her life in atonement so as to save her parents and other family members' lives.

In the same vein, messianism sets in when Ijebu-Jesha people experience no peace in their new settlement. Prince Agudua and a two-day old child are picked as sacrificial lambs just so that the sacred land could be habitable for all Ijebu-Jesha people. The Ifa priest of the host community reveals:

IFAWOLE: ...Ifa says for us to have peace and harmony. A male child from us, and a full-grown man from you must make a journey to the big forest. They must visit the gods. (p. 25)

Intriguingly, to make the sacrificial role messianic, the oracle instructs that the sacrificial lambs should willingly surrender their lives for the sacrifice. The priest further explains: "Good. Just one more snag. The man must willingly give himself up, Baale. The child's mother must also willingly give him up" (p. 25). Yerima therefore writes Agudua to reiterate the concept of scapegoatism/messianism commonly proposed in African traditional religion as a means to solve problems.

Painstakingly looking at Fadelola's husband's case in *Owiwi*, one cannot but subscribe to scapegoatism/messianism as a rescuing means in which one or few souls, willingly or otherwise, are staked for the survival of the populace. Fadelola's husband's soul is demanded by the coven Fadelola belongs to so as to make the family prosper. Without the consent of the husband, he becomes an object of atonement for the assembly of witches mainly to overturn the precarious status of the family.

Contrastively, Yerima writes not only to unearth but also foreground the concept of scapegoatism/messianism in

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Christianity as well. In *Akuabata*, Obiageli's life is not different from her mother's. In the same manner Olanma is betrothed to Iyieke (a god) by her family, so also is Obiageli betrothed to Jesus by her mother. As Olanma's betrothal to Iyieke is elaborately celebrated, so also is Obiageli's covenant ceremony. Hence, she is to remain unmarried just like her mother. With this, Olanma believes she can make up for her past and Obiageli can also save people's lives. Obiageli however loathes the lifestyle chosen for her because it remains unfruitful. Obiageli is in bondage of lifestyle she dislikes. The fact that the mother, Olanma, leads an unfulfilled life makes her consider Obiageli an object of atonement. Olanma does this with a view to overturning her (Olanma's) shortcomings. To show that Obiageli is staked, she expresses her take on the issue when her father questions her sudden change:

ISIUGWU: What happened, child?

I thought you chose to serve Jesus Kristi?

Obiageli: I did not Papa. Mama forced me to go first to the Convent, and in there, there was nothing else I could have become but a Sister. (p. 61)

For the mother, Obiageli cannot choose to be on the contrary side. Olanma is so hell-bent that she barely considers what the lot of her daughter becomes. Her

choice to pitch tent with the Christian folk is, to her, non-negotiable, for she does not want to be castigated. Yerima carefully unearths this:

ISIUGWU: Woman, the whole village will hear.

OLANMA: Let them. The shame is much. What will the other mothers say in Church? "That is Olanma, the mother of the Reverend Sister who wanted a man between her thighs." Alu! Obiageli has killed me, before Iyieke. (p. 63)

For Olanma, Christianity is far superior to African traditional religion. So, she cannot but stake her daughter's life so as to align herself with Christian disciples.

Scapegoatism/Messianism in Christianity is further amplified in *Agudua* as the author succinctly alludes to the death of Jesus. He is ordained to lead and be the saviour of his people, yet his death is precipitated by the betrayal of one of his disciples. More so, his promise to come back to the world in order to save whoever believes in his doctrines and practices validates messianism in Christianity. While reporting *Agudua's* message, Adeleke reveal all his Christ-likeness. Importantly, Yerima does not only attempt to contrast the concept of scapegoatism/messianism in African traditional religion with that of Christianity but also seeks to debunk the

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presumed superiority of the latter to the former. The consciousness of the birth, life and practices of Jesus is not hidden to Africans. This, he posits through the words of Adeleke in *Agudua*: "The very one. Same Odu. Same stories. But they changed hisnames. They call him Jesu..."(p. 61).

The bottom-line of this argument is that the claim of bringing civilization and superior faith to Africa is untenable. By implication, Africans were not ignorant of Jesus' existence, mission, and practices. Ifa had a detailed account of Him prior to the advent of the colonialists. Hence, their coming is materialistic and exploitative.

**Faith as a Mundane Tool.**

In *Heart of Stone, The Sick People* and *Owiwi*, Yerima presents a world where religions become a tool for attaining personal gains – e.g. wealth, fame. Christianity, for instance, was introduced to serve as a "colonizing tool" (Shands, 2008, 23). The existing faith system in Nigeria of today is not different from what was obtainable in the colonial era when the colonialists/imperialists exploited religion for their materialistic mission. Thus, African traditional religion, Christianity, and Islam are nothing but tools of extorting money from people in the hands of some religious leaders. And other adherents use it for certain personal gains. In *Heart of Stone*, for instance, Patu's desperation for solution made her pay some money to

Achief for him to speak with the ancestors on her behalf:

ACHIEF: That is when the ancestral masquerade shall come out to dance once again. That is when I speak with them. Do you have any reservation?

PATU: No...I am happy now. Thank you. (Unties her wrapper and takes out some money which she hands to him. ACHIEF collects it.) (p. 15)

A chief promises to communicate Patu's problem to the ancestors and that is what the money he collects is meant for. However, the death of Musa underscores the fact that Achief merely uses the money collected for a personal purpose.

More so, Sani, a Muslim scholar, exemplifies religious scholars who exploit their pupils to gain wealth and power. Sani's first son, Danladi, attends a good school and is well fed while the pupils in his Qur'anic school wander round the streets begging for alms:

MUSA: I liked your school, Sir. It was the closest to family that I knew. Your first son, Danladi, was my age mate and classmate, his father owned the school. So while we were classified as Almajiris, Danladi, your son, was not. He had

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his hot bath, and washed his mouth. The meals we so looked forward to were his leftovers. You told us it was Allah's divine arrangement. We swallowed it, and believed you. (pp. 56-57)

According to Musa, the youth turn terrorists because most of the clerics are merely interested in becoming Amirul hajj and in making sure their posterity never lacks money.

Osundare unmistakably describes Nigeria as being bastardized by religion. According to him, "Nigeria would be better without the kind of religiosity we have at the moment. Everything terrible in the country is done in the name of religion, according to all these religious adherents" (cited in Adeoti, 2010, p. 169). In *The Sick People*, Olokun priestess, Nene, plays the role of a religious exploiter. She collects sacrificial items in order to help Mama Icodi atone for her sin. That she collects such things might not be bad in itself, but her greedy nature of demanding for more money makes her a bad priestess.

NENE: Onirhode, Olokun protects her own. I saw the coconut, sugarcane, honey, native chalk, cowries, and kola tied in white cloth, but you forgot to send the child.

ONIRHODE: Your wits escape you tonight. (Strong voice.) Did the goddess accept our offerings?

NENE: Would I be here otherwise? The only mistake was in the transport fee you sent. I do not live at the Bar Beach you know. (pp. 15-16)

Nene does not hide her greed for money when she says the money sent for her transport is not enough. She is so carried away by the items that Onirhode has to raise her voice at her. Later on, Nene insists that Iviki is not safe abroad until she pays offerings to Olokun. Onirhode is quick to absolve her daughter of any wrongdoing by saying "She left some money for the offerings" (p. 16). Only then does Nene begin the rite.

Mama Icodi has a different headache – she is concerned about protecting her fame in the church. She does not care that the traditional way of atonement through the goddess of Olokun goes contrary to her Catholic doctrine. But she bothers about what the revelation of such secret, especially to her rival Mama Rosa, would have on her reputation as the leader of the Angels of Mary in the church. The characterisation of Mama Icodi in the play beams some light on the desperation for power among religious leaders. Mama Icodi and Mama Rosa fight and insult each

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other over church leadership due to the fame it would accord them.

Adunni's shuttling between witchcraft and Christianity in *Owiwi* portends a different scenario. In her case, it appears she is destined to lead two spiritual realms without even striving for it. She is to be appointed a new leader of all witches when she is equally the head of all women in a church. Her practice of the two different religions affords her the clout of heading two conflicting spiritual realms. Religion in this wise becomes a pedestal to seats of power. Adunni finds herself between the two opposing faiths because her surrogate father is a Christian while her mother belongs to a coven, a powerful occult world. Ifaoseke clearly unveils this:

IFAOSEKE: I don't know. With either bird, you are head. As Iyaljo in your church, you head the women, a strange new world, but now as Iya Agba of the owls... a world you know so well (chuckle). You are head of everything... (p. 125)

Adunni got initiated into the coven by her mother from childhood and grew up to recognise Christianity as her surrogate father's religion. The fact still remains that she is perturbed, for she is not settled in the opposing spiritual realms.

**Conclusion**

The pattern of faith system in Nigeria, like every other colonized country, is unhealthily orchestrated vis-à-vis the influence of foreign religions - Christianity and Islam. Many a convert simply holds no belief system but an adulterated form of religion. The psychological limbo that evolved from contact with and influence of foreign religions on African traditional religion turns many Africans to psychological refugees both in the foreign and their indigenous faiths. In the words of Bhabha Homi and other scholars of Postcolonialism, most of these converts suffer from unhomeliness. The fact that the majority renounce their traditional religion for alien does not affirm the superiority of the latter to the former but rather showcases the effect of double consciousness they are subjected to. With this fact in view and with a critical x-ray of the selected plays of Yerima, it is discovered that total renunciation of African traditional religion remains elusive. Also, this work has established that the manner in which these alien religions were exploited by the imperialists/colonialists for materialistic/worldly gains, so also it is today by the adherents of these religions. Another factor that disabuses the acclaimed superiority of the foreign religions to the indigenous is the concept of scapegoatism/messianism which is found not to be peculiar to African traditional religion, but glaringly embedded in

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Christianity as well. Finally, these findings lead us to the conclusion that the alien religions being unbendingly romanticized by most Africans are not superior to the condemned/abandoned African traditional religion.

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