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## **The drama of Ahmed Yerima : studies in Nigerian theatre**

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## Chapter Three

### **Religious Realist Play: *The Angel, The Twist, Uncle Venyil, Mirror Cracks, The Bishop and The Soul, and The Wives***

As stated previously, it is not my intention to discuss realism as a literary movement but as a writing style in the selected dramas. The Nigerian reader-audiences are already familiar with the language of the characters, the issues in the plays and other nuances that help to embellish the work. I categorize the dramas in this chapter as religious realist plays because of their thematic preoccupation and the style of the writing of the plays, which are consistent factors for the progression of the plays. This does not mean that the language and characters of the plays are different from what is inherent in the society. In fact, these elements are visible in the Nigerian reader-audience reality.

In a society like the one of Nigeria where religion has a lot of bearing on both the government and on citizens, how independent can Yerima be allowed to write? This question will guide the discussion of this chapter. In Nigeria, there is a measure of contradiction in the practice of the three dominant religions: African Traditional Beliefs (ATBs), Islam and Christianity. There is palpable evidence that the practitioners of Christianity and Islam are not fully converted from the indigenous belief system. Therefore, they practice the dominant religions side by side with the suppressed ones.

The term religious realism is used in this work as the representation of contemporary religion by literature using a certain writing style. In this chapter I investigate Yerima's plays by looking at the influence of Christianity, Islam and ATBs religion on contemporary Nigerian society, especially the important role they play in the government and in the people's everyday life. I look at how religion determines the perception and thinking of the people in relation to the society and societal institutions. J.N.K. Mugambi argues that, "[f]rom the period of the missionary enterprise, African converts came to understand the Christian way of life as being identical with the norms of conduct set for them by the missionaries who introduced Christianity in each particular locality."<sup>380</sup> According to Mugambi this explains that Christianity was seen "not just as a new way of life, but as a Euro-American way of life."<sup>381</sup> In Nigeria, there is a visible conflict between those who practice the three dominant religions.

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<sup>380</sup> Mugambi, J.N.K., (ed.), *Critiques of Christianity in African Literature: With particular Reference to the East African Context* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1992), 1

<sup>381</sup> Mugambi, J.N.K., (ed.), *Critiques of Christianity in African Literature: With particular Reference to the East African Context* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1992), 1

However, while Islam is relatively receptive to the ATBs, Christianity aims to annihilate it. For example, introduction of Christianity coincided with introduction of colonialism which the people fought strongly to resist. In fact most of the missionaries who brought Christianity to the country are members of the colonial community. Because of this link, Christianity was accepted with a level of skepticism by the majority of the people. African critics of Christianity argue that it is a religion imposed by colonialists in order to allow them easy control of the minds of the people. Critics like Wole Soyinka, Biodun Jeyifo, Femi Osofisan, and Ahmed Yerima believe that the Christian religion works negatively on the psyche of the people and destroys the communal spirit innate in their indigenous beliefs (the belief in a common ancestor):

The greatest negative contributions of colonialism to the minds of the African was the introduction and forceful adoption of the second religion to their consciousness and process of opening the eyes of the Africans to the ethnic and race differences among them. This destroyed the innate African communal spirit, and sadly, [...] The ‘figure of double religious mind’ started to emerge. In order to not be seen to have lost one’s traditional identity, the African, or Nigerian in particular, kept his traditional links with his ancestors. This link was usually consciously suppressed, but the expressed one was to either attend mosque prayers on Fridays or church services on Sundays. The duality of religion also allowed the African or Nigerian to live within the duality of his societal signification.<sup>382</sup>

Within the Yoruba area of Nigeria alone at least four hundred gods exist which form the peoples different spiritual beliefs. The Yorubas are one group in a country with more than three hundred ethnic nationalities. So, to homogenize the spiritual beliefs and age-long understanding of these various groups into two faiths (Christianity and Islam) will only present a sense of confusion within the individual.

Christianity in Nigeria and, indeed, in many other parts of Africa, is opposed to “traditional cultural and spiritual beliefs”<sup>383</sup>, thereby, creating a

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<sup>382</sup> Yerima, Ahmed, *Theatre, Culture and Politics: Essays in Dramatic and Cultural Theory* (Lagos: Concept Publications, 2007), 141

<sup>383</sup> Reid, Abra, “Christianity and Yoruba: The Fusing of Influences in Wole Soyinka’s works” in *African Postcolonial Literature in English*, English 32, Spring 1990  
<http://www.postcolonialweb.org/nigeria/xytyyorub.html>

duality of religious practices. This is not to mean that there is no evidence of syncretism between traditional spiritual beliefs and Christianity in some instances.<sup>384</sup> However, those who attempted or practiced a mixture of the two religions are often frowned at and/or rejected by the missionaries and some over-zealous practitioners of Christianity whenever they meet. Nevertheless, it must be noted that, despite this hostility, many of those who practice Christianity also observe traditional cultural and spiritual beliefs in a suppressed form at one point or another in their lives. For example, it is common for a Nigerian Christian to visit a *Babalawo*<sup>385</sup> or traditional healer when struck by an unknown ailment or in search for solution to what he considers an impediment to his attaining material and spiritual satisfaction. This is done because of his beliefs that a Babalawo communicates with the gods and other esoteric powers that control the affairs of man. It is also common to have traditional chieftaincy titles like *Otun* (Right Hand of the Leader), *Osi* (Left-Hand of the Leader), *Baba Ijo* (Father/Elder in the church), and *Iya Ijo* (Mother/Senior-woman in the church) in some churches. Though, these people who are thus referred to in the church are often not known to hold the same title in traditional society. Their influence as title-holder is only within the church. This is a form of syncretism. In many instances, these people (practitioners of dual religions) make a clear demarcation of the two practices even when there is an overlapping of titles. The practice is in contrast to the position of Euro-American missionaries who imposed the Christian doctrine on Nigerians.

It is also against the views of some over-zealous Nigerian Pastors, Evangelists, and converts who hold the position that “there was nothing valuable in African cultural and religious heritage.”<sup>386</sup> Such a position is contrary to what was taught by the missionaries who brought the faith to Africa and introduced some of their pagan festivals like the celebration of Christmas, weddings, days of specific saints, and others as part of the religion. In Nigeria, if you want to overtly hold onto your cultural and spiritual beliefs, you are

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<sup>384</sup> United Native African Church or First African Church Mission (the first splinter group from Anglican Church in Nigeria), The Aladura Church, Cherubim and Seraphim Church Movement, Celestial Church of Christ, and other white garment Churches are noted to have allowed the a mixture of some African cultural practices into Christianity.

<sup>385</sup> Babalawo is derived from two Yoruba words; Baba (Father) and Awo (Mystery). The name can be Babalawo or Baba awo. A Babalawo is a sage or high priest who is well versed in the rituals, the lore and the history of the Yoruba tradition/religion called IFA. He is a father in the knowledge of things material and spiritual. For a clearer understanding of Babalawo see <http://ifa-houseofwisdom.com/babalawo.html>

<sup>386</sup> Mugambi, J.N.K., (ed.), *Critiques of Christianity in African Literature: With particular Reference to the East African Context* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1992), 5

annonbeliever; because the first criteria to be a true Christian is to ignore your African background as it is “primitive” and the people are “pagan” and “heathens.”<sup>387</sup> According to Mugambi, “this assumption has led to the hesitation and widespread refusal by many missionaries and African Christians to take African religions seriously, for fear of syncretism.”<sup>388</sup> Western-style educated Nigerian Christians are most guilty of this. However, some of them discreetly follow some aspects of the religion of their ancestors which the non-Western-style educated people embrace. This is explained by a popular Yoruba dictum: “Igbagbo oni ki ama s’oro” (Christianity does not forbid us the practice of the mystery of the conclave<sup>389</sup>).

Religious duality is a common aspect of Nigerian society. Yerima explores this aspect of the Nigerian people in many of his characters. For example, Kaka in *Uncle Venyil* is an embodiment of this duality of religious practice; she succumbs to the consciously suppressed traditional cultural and spiritual beliefs when it becomes apparent that the overt Christian religion has failed to rescue her son from incarceration.

Yerima’s major concern in the analyzed plays revolves around death, the influence of religions, and the search for inner peace. He uses realism as a mode of writing to investigate the contradictory nature of religious man within society. In the author’s note of *The Angel*, Yerima writes that it:

is my definition of faith, salvation, greed, politics, death, and the world we lived in. I have tried not to trap myself within the inhuman existence the world finds itself [in] today. For fear of forcing the play to be relevant, I have embarked on a trip of self-identification, self-education of a now dangerous world replete with the dangers of human ambition and what I like to call the trapping of a changing society. Finally, I have not gone too near culture here, just ordinary everyday

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<sup>387</sup> Mugambi, J.N.K., (ed.), *Critiques of Christianity in African Literature: With particular Reference to the East African Context* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1992), 5

<sup>388</sup> Mugambi, J.N.K., (ed.), *Critiques of Christianity in African Literature: With particular Reference to the East African Context* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1992), 5

<sup>389</sup> Oro is a cultic society closely guarded by the Ogboni (Assemblage of powerful members of the traditional community whose duties include the making, fortifying of Kings and punishing same if he errs) to inspire awe in the people of the community and to pronounce final punishment on any one accused by the town as being evil after thorough investigation. The Ogboni is the traditional law enforcer and Judge of the Yoruba community, and Oro is paraded round the street when there is propitiation to be done on the land and before the burying of an important member of the community who is recently deceased.

life and people both young and old, you and I, so that I may just be able to touch you.<sup>390</sup>

While I agree with the statement that the play discusses “faith, salvation, greed, politics, death”, I disagree with Yerima’s statement, “I have not gone too near culture here.”<sup>391</sup> This is because the latter contradicts the earlier statement. If the dictionary definition of culture as “the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group”<sup>392</sup> is acceptable, then Yerima’s plays are rooted in the cultural belief system of his people. According to the following definition, culture is:

the shared patterns of behaviors and interactions, cognitive constructs, and affective understanding that are learned through a process of socialization. These shared patterns identify the members of a culture group while also distinguishing those of another group.<sup>393</sup>

Yerima’s definition of culture as “the way of life evolved by a people in their attempts to meet the challenges of living in their environment”<sup>394</sup> buttresses my argument that these plays are culture specific.

I will reiterate here J.P. Lederach’s viewpoint which is suitable for my argument: “Culture is rooted in the shared knowledge and schemes created and used by a set of people for perceiving, interpreting, expressing, and responding to social realities around them.”<sup>395</sup> Based on this, I believe that faith, salvation, politics, and death, apart from being universal subjects, have different meanings in different societies and cultures. Moreover, the way that Yerima presents the subject of death in the plays is based on traditional cultural and spiritual beliefs. Since the setting of *The Angel* is Yoruba culture, the behavior of the characters will be based on cultural and spiritual beliefs that are common among the people (Yoruba) even when the playwright’s intention is to distance them from it as much as possible. Though the statement referred to above is not

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<sup>390</sup> Yerima, Ahmed, *The Angel and Other Plays* (Ibadan: Kraft Books, 2004), 9

<sup>391</sup> Yerima, Ahmed, *The Angel and Other Plays* (Ibadan: Kraft Books, 2004), 9

<sup>392</sup> <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/culture>

<sup>393</sup> This definition by The Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition (CARLA) University of Minnesota is on the center’s website

<http://www.carla.umn.edu/culture/definitions.html>

<sup>394</sup> Yerima, Ahmed, *Theatre, Culture, and Politics: Essays in Dramatic and Cultural Theory* (Lagos: Concept Publication, 2007), 43

<sup>395</sup> Lederach, J.P., *Preparing for Peace: Conflict Transformation Across Cultures* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1995), 9

part of the play itself, it is still important for me to quote it here because it sets the tone of the play. It tells the reader-audience of the gloom that can be expected in the narrative. The melancholic disposition of the playwright is already visible before one opens the play, when he writes: "For fear of forcing the play to be relevant, I have embarked on a trip of self-identification, self-education of a now dangerous world replete with the dangers of human ambition."<sup>396</sup>

He is not particular about the reception that awaits the play; rather, he expects the work to be an attempt at self-identification and self-education. It is not unlikely for a playwright or reader-audience to identify a character in a play or action to being similar to his own person. On the level of education, it depends largely on what he wishes to learn. Identifying oneself in a performance or play-text can help in purging the person of a certain emotion. In other words, such identification brings about *katarsis*. It is my understanding that purgation of emotion provides psychological analysis of the operation of the conscious and the unconscious in an individual's present circumstance. It is what Etop Akwang refers to as "the fracture of psyche and subjectivity."<sup>397</sup> With *The Angel*, Yerima questions what it is that determines "superior religion", the logic of faith and the belief in miracles, dreams, and the supernatural. He presents a reality that appears logical and normal by revealing the daily sufferings of the characters in his plays. Though someone not familiar with the society that Yerima is writing about may argue that those who are dead do not appear to the living in any way, many of his people have a contrary view. Thus, he imbues his characters with frailty that continually draws them to powers that are external to their physical reality in order to be set free from the sufferings they are experiencing. In *The Twist*, Yerima's note is not necessary because it is misleading, and also contradicts itself:

The play *The Twist* is just me twisting round the concepts of fate, faith, logic, guilt, forgiveness, illusion, and reality. This is why it was easy for me to find a solution to this play that does not end but attempts to introduce a discourse in the depth of your mind. I hope you do meet

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<sup>396</sup> Yerima, Ahmed, *The Angel and Other Plays* (Ibadan: Kraft Books, 2004), 9

<sup>397</sup> Etop, Akwang, "Rembrandt's Consciousness: A Study of the Recession and Recovery of Subjectivity in Yerima's *The Bishop* and *The Soul and Thank You Lord*" in Inegbe, S.E., and Uwemedimo Atakpo (eds.), *Making Images, Re-making Life: Art and Life in Ahmed Yerima* (Uyo: Modern Business Press, 2007), 32



your own stumbling blocks in trying to unravel the reasons why faith is such a heavy burden.<sup>398</sup>

I think “easy for me to find a solution to this play”, means that he was able to resolve all conflicts in the play. However, he contradicted himself when he writes that, “this play does not end.” If Yerima’s plays are looked at in this manner, it will be easier to unravel how the explicit and the implicit dialogue relate with the happenings in the characters social community. In *The Mirror Cracks*, Yerima writes:

...my preoccupation, if any, is of the child and family values. What makes a man what he becomes and how human beings learn to bear and cope with the loss. Most of all, I hope I have transferred my inner fears of death, of life, in contrasts with our acts in life and the judgment after, to the three-dimensional cracked images which often mirror the complex symbiosis of the human psyche.<sup>399</sup>

The statement “Most of all, I hope I have transferred my inner fears of death, of life, in contrasts with our acts in life and the judgment after” links what I said about the fact that fate, faith, guilt, forgiveness, discussed in *The Angel*, may belong to the realm of cultural and religious beliefs. While secular reasoning will state that, after death, man ceases to exist, culture and religion often talk of “the judgment after”. In this statement, Yerima is concerned about the influence of the environment and social community on man. External influence often questions man’s position on life and death, and the influence of both on human consciousness. It is true that life ceases for the dead, but those alive cannot objectively conclude that those who are dead do not exist somewhere else, and neither can anybody state with all certainty that they are existing. So, we often rely on culture and religion to find a solution to the mystery presented by the phenomena of life and death.

Yerima revisits the thought of death and pain in *The Portraits* as he writes:

...Writing *The Portraits* allowed me to express the wonderfully complex human nature with the use of words. Most of all, it allowed

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<sup>398</sup> Yerima, Ahmed, *The Twists*, in *The Angel and Other Plays* (Ibadan: Kraft Books, 2004), 81

<sup>399</sup> See Yerima, Ahmed, *The Mirror Cracks*, in *The Angel and Other Plays* (Ibadan: Kraft Books, 2004), 113

me to express how sometimes it is too late to make amends when we hesitate, when all we would have said was ‘sorry’.<sup>400</sup>

How effectively one can portray the complexity of human nature in dramatic text is hinged on the knowledge of the human psyche. Playwrights often dissect their characters using rhetoric to communicate what might be their own fear or inner conflict. Yerima’s statement on *Uncle Venyil* is important here to substantiate my argument:

...the Nigerian society and my personal life created all the possibilities for me to find my thematic thrust and hang the meaning of my play on characters so innocent, so pure and yet so total in becoming victims of circumstances beyond them. ...my play inhabits and emerges from a society in a complex clash with its own psychoanalytical search for the meaning of self, while it also highlights the internal conflict in order to achieve obvious societal self-destruction. In the play, repression becomes an instrument of fear. Venyil is the victim of the absoluteness of power personified in the person of the “punisher”. Venyil captures, for me, a level of dehumanizing violence...real and raw pain...which pervaded my country for a frightful while. And the sad reality is that no matter how high up or low the victims were, the experience broke the defensive or protective mechanism which separates man from animal or sane from insane.<sup>401</sup>

Yerima uses terms like “dehumanizing violence...real and raw” which he said pervaded his “country for a frightful while” as a motivation for not just this singular play but for most of his plays. His representation of death in *The Wives* is not different from the murky, pessimistic, death, pain and the gloom that seems to be familiar in the other plays. In this play, revelation of incest that follows Chief Gbadegesin’s death suggests that man cannot escape judgment in this life. Death will not be a cover of any immoral act perpetuated by man while alive. In *The Wives* and *The Mirror Cracks*, Yerima seems to suggest that, in death, many secrets will be revealed and judgment will be delivered here on earth with whatever reputation the deceased left behind.

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<sup>400</sup> Yerima, Ahmed, *The Portraits*, in *The Angel and Other Plays* (Ibadan: Kraft Books, 2004), 143

<sup>401</sup> Yerima, Ahmed, *Uncle Venyil*, in *The Angel and Other Plays* (Ibadan: Kraft Books, 2004), 43

By allowing the appearance of an already dead character to resolve the conflict in *The Angel* makes a mockery of Christianity. This is because Otunba Durosimi is a self-professed Christian who does not subscribe to ATBs. To Otunba Durosimi Christian's mind, Chief (the ghost) is an angel sent by God to his family. It is likely that these plays *The Portraits*, *The Angel* and *Uncle Venyil* are an attempt by Yerima to question the belief in the superiority of one religion over another. This is because while one religion (Christianity) states that death is the end for all man, another religion (ATBs) believes that the dead can be summoned to mediate in the affairs of the living.

## Structure

Yerima employs traditional cultures, proverbs and religions that audiences of his plays are familiar with as tools for the play's progression. All of the plays under discussion consist of one act. All the ofplays have plotlines with subplots, and each of them maintains a single setting. In all the plays studied, the actions take place in one day. In *The Angel* action takes place in the sitting room of Otunba<sup>402</sup>. The play opens with Otunba praying to "Father" for a miraculous healing for his sick and bedridden wife, Rachel. Through him, we learn that she is suffering from a terminal kidney disease. In *The Twist*, a miracle is what Rev. Noah seeks for his condemned son who is sentenced to death by the court. He is scheduled the following day to face the hangman's noose for murder during a robbery. *The Twist* is set in the sitting room of Chief Ojuolape. He is making final arrangements for the burial the next day for his late son, Dolapo a victim of the armed robbery attack of Rev. Noah's son. The play opens with Noah entering the sitting room of Otunba Ojuolape to beg for mercy for his condemned son.

*The Angel*, *The Wives*, *The Twist*, and *The Mirror Cracks* deal with the subjects of death and pain especially the emotional pain associated with the death of loved ones. Apart from *The Bishop*, most of what serves as the springboard for the other plays is reported to have taken place before the beginning of the plays.

The death of Christopher two years earlier is reported to be the cause of Rachel's illness in *The Angel*, as she lost the will to live, thus, every action follows this revelation. The play is set on the second anniversary of his death. In *The Mirror Cracks*, Ambassador Gabi is also making final preparations, getting ready for the burial of his son Supo who died on a peace-keeping

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<sup>402</sup> *Otunba* which means the right-hand of the King is a chieftaincy title among the Yorubas. It is often bestowed on a wealthy individual within the community.

mission, when a young lady of sixteen years old suddenly arrives from their son's mission field in Sierra Leone. She informs Supo's parents that their late son was an animal. All the events in *The Mirror Cracks* centres on the memory of Supo and the perceived collective failure of his parents. While they were busy building their own careers to become a successful diplomat and a judge, their son was left to the care of servants when he was growing up. The entire course of action takes place a day preceding the burial of Supo.

Yerima's choice of setting for the two plays (*The Twists* and *The Mirror Cracks*) on the day before the burial of the sons of the main characters is not a mere coincidence but intentional. As it is the case in *The Wives*, he believes that, before the burial, truth about the deceased must come to light. Most often at the death of a member of the family, good deeds and other qualities are discussed in order to paint a picture of sainthood. I assume that Yerima's intention is to buttress his point on the judgment that comes after death takes place on earth.

Yerima also weaves in these plays elements of surprise. This dramatic element allows the plays to build up to denouement. However, as most of the plays end suddenly, he leaves the reader-audience to come to their own conclusion. *The Wives* revolves around the sharing of the properties and burying of Otunba, whose casket is placed at the centre of the sitting room from the beginning of the play to the end. Yerima put four women together discussing the life and death of their husband and father of their children while the corpse still remains unburied and foul-smelling. At one particular time, the women were even drinking and dancing to the music of Frank Sinatra "I did it my way" when Baba Ajagbe and Ifagbemi, two elderly male relatives of Otunba, enter the room. The song is used in the play as a metaphor; it signifies the fact that everybody is responsible for his own actions in life. However, this is in contradiction to what occurs in *The Twists* and *The Mirror Cracks* where the parents are working to better the careers of their children. The appearances of the two elderly men and the Chief's lawyer on the stage turn the direction of the play to that of fact finding on the cause of his death. After discovering that he died as a result of having committed an abominable act of incest, the rest of the actions only follow a trajectory course to the end, leading to the identity of the chief's incest victim and the identity of the child born as a result.

In analyzing *The Bishop*, it is important to ask the following questions: Which among the following two forces is responsible for the evil machination in the life of man: Esu, the Yoruba's god of mischief who dwells on the cross-road and boundaries of the world, or Satan, the biblical devil who deceives the

people of the world against God's instructions in order to have them as his followers? Is man's escape from other forces foreign to him based on his personal effort or the performance of supernatural forces? What significance does man's belief in the supernatural have on his existence and survival in the world? Will man still remain man without the presence of supernatural forces? These questions propel the plotline of *The Angel*, *Uncle Venyil*, *The Twists* and *The Mirror Cracks*. For, in all these plays, there exist dual supernatural forces that wrestle within the various characters. There is Esu and God in *The Bishop*, and Sango and God in *The Twist*. Yerima imbues his protagonists with dual characteristics. All the protagonists believe in the existence of God, yet question God's position in their precarious situations. Otunba in *The Angel* kneels and prays to God for a miraculous healing of his wife and, at the same time, blames the same God for her sickness:

Otunba: ... First, her legs, now she finds it difficult to even breathe. They say only one of her kidney works now. Father, do something. Can't you do something to help her get better? [...] Send something, Send us a miracle, Father, save Rachel ...save my beautiful jewel. You give her so heavy a cross to bear.<sup>403</sup>

While Otunba believes that, without a miracle, Rachel cannot get better, Kaka in *Uncle Venyil* has little or no faith in miracles even though she prays to God. Kaka prays frequently to God for early release of her political activist son, Venyil, from the solitary confinement of the government. Even though she prays, she has doubts as to the ability of God to have an effect on the early release of Venyil before she dies.

Both in Otunba and Kaka, I find examples of the contradiction that religion has come to represent in our daily lives. It becomes a place of solace to retire to when one becomes helpless in the face of a threat coming from superior forces. Although Yerima did not indicate the length of time Venyil is in government detention, it is suggested by Kaka that she has been going to the church to pray for his release for a long time. Based on this point, it is normal for her to have some doubt in a miraculous release after a long period of time. Kaka believes in the existence of God, which is why she goes to church for prayer every day. However, for her, the church has nothing to do with her belief in God. As a Christian she goes to church simply to pray and show off her new dresses.

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<sup>403</sup> Yerima, Ahmed, *The Angel and Other Plays* (Ibadan: Kraft Books, 2004), 11

As a parishioner in Nigeria, you pay tithe of your income and offering to the church, and you give gifts to the reverend priest. You are also required to make contributions to the construction of a new church building and also to the purchase of a new set of musical instruments. So, to Kaka withdrawal of her contribution to the church is a way of punishing it. As the church makes demands on her and other members, she can exert punishment on the church because church is like a human being who makes demands. She blames the church for making her sell her fattest goat in order to pay for a cloth; the church ought to have bought it for her and the rest of the elderly people in the parish. She concludes that if the church, in this case represented by the Reverend Priest and those who direct the service cannot meet the needs of the widows and elderly members of the congregation, she too can reduce her contribution to them as well. To Kaka, the church has failed her, and God's helps to release her son from prison while she is alive is uncertain:

Kaka: ...God! So I have resolved to punish the [c]hurch for making me sell my fattest goat. I have the money, but I shall pay a naira every Sunday until Venyil is out of prison, and I have a good reason to wear the dress to church to glorify God. But if I should die before Venyil come[s] out, or I finish paying the balance of their money is in the old snuff tin under the bed. I want to go to the gate of heaven singing, not explaining to God how I sold my goat and still kept the money from the church...<sup>404</sup>

As I have mentioned earlier, to Kaka, church is a "Being" which makes demands on the members. So, refusing to make any tangible contribution to the church or not responding to the call to give to the church makes her feel as though she is punishing the church. Kaka also believes that the church is not taking care of the needs of the aged and the widows as instructed by the Bible. Kaka's anger is reinforced by the fact that she sold her precious goat in order to meet the church demand. In *The Twist*, Rev, Noah, as a young man, and his father worshipped Sango, the Yoruba god of thunder, as the family god. However, as an adult, he became a reverend in the Anglican Church after graduating from the theological institution.

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<sup>404</sup> Yerima, Ahmed, *Uncle Venyil*, in *The Angel and Other Plays* (Ibadan: Kraft Books, 2004), 47

In *The Bishop*, Bishop, like Rev. Noah in *The Twist*, was born into a traditional African family. He was dedicated at birth to the family god Esu<sup>405</sup> and given the traditional name, Esubiyi. At his birth he was consecrated the priest of the trickster god. On the contrary, as fate would have it, instead of becoming the priest of Esu, he became a Christian priest, performing healings with his acquired supernatural power. However, he is torn between two opposing forces who want his services:

Iyagana: Esubiyi, you are still a child ... From the day you were born ...we touched your lips with palm oil from the shrine of Esu, you were marked for him ...My Bishop, it is time to leave this rubbish and find peace with yourself. Let us go home.<sup>406</sup>

With this statement and the tone of its finality “Let us go home”, Iyagana means that Bishop should embrace the priesthood of Esu. Etop Akwang considering the various problems, both physical and spiritual that the Bishop has had to pass through in a short while and concludes that Bishop’s “present travails in the play seem to be rooted in the innocent childhood initiation into the cult of Esu.”<sup>407</sup> However, this interpretation can be questioned. First of all, there is no reason to suggest that Bishop’s travail is not normal occurrence. Second, such a conclusion misrepresents the figure and functions of Esu, the Yoruba god of mischief. By understanding the importance of Esu, or other gods within the Yoruba or Africans’ cosmogony, both Akwang and Yerima are not helping to clarify the blurred boundaries the early Euro-American missionaries created in their literature and history<sup>408</sup> of Africa. What Euro-American missionaries and colonialists created in Africa was the concept of higher religion against lower religion. The lower religion is considered inferior to the higher religion. This can be described as a process whereby known African institutions, traditions and culture become inferior to both the Euro-American

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<sup>405</sup> Some interpretations, especially the Yoruba’s in Nigeria write the name as Esu, while others prefer Eshu. The meaning is the same.

<sup>406</sup> Yerima, *The Bishop*, 51

<sup>407</sup> Akwang, A., “Rembrandt Consciousness: A Study of the Recession and Recovery of Subjectivity in Yerima’s *The Bishop and The Soul and Thank You Lord*”, in Inegbe S.E., and Uwemedimo Atakpo, (eds.), *Making Images, Remaking Life: Art and Life in Ahmed Yerima* (Uyo: Modern Business Press, 2007), 39

<sup>408</sup> Kalu, Anthonia, C., “African Literature and the Traditional Arts: Speaking Arts, Molding Theory” in *Research in African Literature*, 31/4 Winter, (Indiana University Press, 2000), 46-62

missionaries' religious order and to new institutions of the colonial tradition.<sup>409</sup> In this process, "servant" is negative while "master" is a positive force. To continue to relate to indigenous gods and cultural practices in Africa as being negative in relation to Christianity by Africans and is nothing but the greatest evil against the continent. How can we blame the constant struggle in the life of Supo in *The Mirror Cracks* and Bishop in *The Bishop* against Esu, a god which the two characters never acknowledged? Supo grew up in a wealthy house with a gentleman father, a mass server in the church who joined the military with his own mission in mind:

Hawa: ... Then, I felt sorry for him. He was in a constant struggle to control the animal in him. He would burn down a house because he was not sure if people were hiding there. Yet, that same night, I saw him risk his life to save two little babies the mothers had abandoned. [...] For each life he wasted, he saved two to buy back his soul.<sup>410</sup>

In the Christian Bible, when a man constantly struggles to control himself of any malevolent spirit, it suggests the possession of a demonic spirit. For example, Mary Magdalene<sup>411</sup> and the man at Gadarenes that is possessed with the legion demon.<sup>412</sup> Yerima has a penchant for imbuing his characters with two poles called "tradition and modernity". Tradition, in this case, refers to that culture which is indigenous to Africans such as faith, fate, customs, social practice and other lores of pre-colonial Africa that remained in existence even during colonial and post-colonial experiences and that are presented as "unchanging" in the course of history. By modernity, I mean that Yerima refers to the culture which is introduced through contact with the non-Africans at the end of the nineteenth century. This is a form of modernity which Terence O. Ranger discussed extensively in his article "The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa."<sup>413</sup> This perceived modernity came to Nigeria through colonialism, Euro-American missionaries and Western-style education.

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<sup>409</sup> Terence O. Ranger, "The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa" in Eric J. Hobsbaw and Terence O. Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 211-262

<sup>410</sup> Yerima, Ahmed, *The Mirror Crack*, in *The Angel and Other Plays*, 126

<sup>411</sup> See Luke 8:2 of *King James Version Bible* for the deliverance of Mary Magdalene from seven different demons.

<sup>412</sup> See Mark 5:1-13 of *King James Version Bible* for the deliverance of Gadarenes' man delivered from demon called Legion.

<sup>413</sup> Terence O. Ranger, "The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa" in Eric J. Hobsbaw and Terence O. Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 211-262



Modernity came with faiths and new cultural beliefs alien to the indigenous communities. The notion of tradition, as opposed to modernity, was not in existence in Africa prior to its introduction through colonization. This is what T.O. Ranger refers to as “European invented tradition.”<sup>414</sup>

It must be noted that the modernity that the colonialists imposed on African countries is alien to continental Europe. In the perception of colonialists, non-Western cultures and traditions to which Africa belongs are considered to be “fundamentally hostile to modernity and incompatible with modernization.”<sup>415</sup> This was the thinking until the emergence of the nationalist spirit which brought many African countries independence from their colonial masters. The nationalists discovered that their fathers had been susceptible to accept without questioning the imposed “modern” traditions which aimed to annihilate the existing traditions. As Christianity was a major tool in the modernization by the colonial masters, contemporary African Christian elites still hold the erroneous position of defining modernity by the introduction of Christianity in Africa. They project a master-servant position. In Europe and America, modernity is defined from the position of economic and technological advancement of a nation, including the adoption of modern political principles which separate religion from politics. In such a concept of modernity neither Christianity nor any other world religion has any primal position. Rather, it is secularisation which is seen as fundamental to modernity and governments do not impose a form of religion on its citizenry as the state distances itself from a particular religious stance.<sup>416</sup> The people are thus free to belong or not belong to a religion and even choose to completely dismiss religion at all without criticism.

In Africa, Nigeria in particular, secularism is not yet a definitive political concept or ideology. Although the government did not impose a singular religion on the country, secularism has no form among people whose beliefs are God centered. The Nigerian government maintains a close relationship with the religions of its citizens. For example, the government house (Aso Rock) in Abuja is home to both church and Mosque. Since religious beliefs and cultural practices often define what is tradition and what is modern in Africa, its various governments make great efforts to have both

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<sup>414</sup> Terence O. Ranger, “The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa” in Eric J. Hobsbawn and Terence O. Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 228

<sup>415</sup> Mirsepassi, Ali, *Intellectual Discourse and the Politics of Modernization: Negotiating Modernity in Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 2

<sup>416</sup> This view is with the exemption of United Kingdom and Germany as both still give a measure of authority to Christianity.

developments side by side. However, indigenous religion and Christianity are standing on two opposing sides. In an attempt to make a distinction between Esu and the Biblical Devil or Satan, as well as to answer some of the questions I raised earlier in this work, it is better to talk briefly about the Yorubas' belief on Esu. According to the Yoruba worldview, Orunmila is the deity imbued with power of world knowledge, the god of Ifa oracle and principle of preordained order in Yoruba religious reality. He is outwardly opposed to "Eshu-Elegba, the principle of chance, uncertainty, and chaos."<sup>417</sup> Despite this opposition, Esu is ever present in the Ifa divination tray as the messenger god of Orunmila and other deities. The function of messenger of gods is an assignment given to Eshu, the god of contradictions, exposition of text and mischievousness by Olodumare, the Supreme God, who created the heaven and the earth and everything in it. In the Christian metaphysics, the Devil exists as opposition to Jehovah/God in heaven. To the Yoruba Christians, a new level of contradictory consciousness becomes apparent in the existence of God and their various indigenous gods. This contradiction was created by the Euro-American missionaries of the Nineteenth century who viewed all the gods in Africa as evil, and those worshiping them as worshipping the devil. In support of my argument is a statement by Søren Kierkegaard, the Danish philosopher, which I find appropriate for this discussion. He describes well how contradictions in consciousness cause anguish and despair:

The consciousness of this contradiction causes anguish, and anguish ends in despair -- the individual accepts existence as a mystery which he cannot hope to fathom. But because of the coincidence of opposites, from despair rises faith and faith gives the individual the hope of redemption by means of grace. I abandon myself to the grace of God; I pray, and the prayer gives me the "pre-sentiment" that time will be changed into eternity and death into life.<sup>418</sup>

While Yerima tries to appeal to his own religious consciousness by locating evil and good in his religious realist dramas, he could be accused of furthering the assumptions of Euro-American missionaries, and African Christians. These assumptions assign the evil part to African indigenous religions and gods (especially Esu) and the good act to the Christian God. For example, in *The*

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<sup>417</sup> Wright, Derek, *Wole Soyinka Revisited* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1993), 10

<sup>418</sup> Kierkegaard, Søren in *The Philosophy of Existentialism: Danish and German Existentialism*. <http://www.radicalacademy.com/adiphiexistentialism.htm>

*Bishop*, Iyagana is presented as Esu's messenger who arrives on the scene to tempt Bishop. Iyagana's statement bewitches Bishop until the arrival of Rev. Father Emmanuel, who releases him from the spell. Iyagana's mission is to summon Bishop back to his ancestral gods. Esu, whom Yerima regarded as the force of evil in *The Bishop*, is a fate-deity, messenger-god and interpreter for the other deities. He is imbued by *Olodumare*<sup>419</sup> with "Ase" the power that propagates itself, in this case "the force of coherence of process itself, that which makes a system a system."<sup>420</sup> Esu, the cross-road and boundaries' god is likened to Hermes in Greek mythology. All that Hermes possesses, Esu also possesses. According to the Yorubas' belief, Esu is the indigenous "black metaphor for the literary critics, and Esu-tufunnalo is the study of the methodological principle of interpretation itself, or what the literary critic does."<sup>421</sup> I understand that Esu is the text interpreter. Esu's crossroad and boundaries metaphor is to serve as a place of individual choice. Every man arriving at the crossroad and boundaries of life is responsible for his own actions and inaction. This is because Esu does not choose for a man, he allows free-will and, however, as a messenger of gods, he is a fate enforcer. The shrine of Esu with its priests and devotees are found in almost all the Yoruba cities in Nigeria, Africa and even in South America where you can find a large population of diasporic Yorubas.<sup>422</sup> The fact that the Yorubas have spread in population and the transposition of their worldview across boundaries and geographical spread gives any of its numerous gods a wider appeal. Esu, according to Femi Osofisan "has been much maligned by Christians and mistaken for Satan."<sup>423</sup> Osofisan adds that Esu:

Far from being the repulsive devil of Christian mythology, he is, in fact, among the most important deities in the Yoruba pantheon, representing the principle of free choice and of revolution –the god who, with his prominent Phallus, promiscuously incarnates [not only]

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<sup>419</sup> Olodumare is the Yoruba Supreme Deity, the same as the Christian God. The Yorubas' believe that Olodumare is the creator of heaven and the earth and everything in it, including man.

<sup>420</sup> Molefi, K.A., Abu, S.A., eds., *African Intellectual Heritage: a Book of Sources* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996), 163

<sup>421</sup> Molefi, K.A., and Abu, S.A., (eds.), *African Intellectual Heritage: a Book of Sources* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996), 163

<sup>422</sup> Euba, Femi, *Archetypes, Imprecators and Victims of Fate* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989)

<sup>423</sup> Osofisan, Femi, "Femi Osofisan: Formal Strategies and Social Commentary" in Jeyifo Biodun (ed.), *Modern African Drama* (New York: Norton Critical Editions, 2001), 616

the place of doubt and disjunction, but also of justice and accommodation, in our metaphysical cosmos.”<sup>424</sup>

Based on the characteristics of Esu as described by Osofisan, there is a difference between the god and Satan. It has also been argued by many scholars of Yoruba religions that Esu is not the same as the Satan of the Judeo-Christian Bible.<sup>425</sup> To appropriate evil to any religious form from Africa is not acceptable in an unbiased discourse. Nevertheless, this is contrary to what we have in both *The Bishop* and *Uncle Venyil*, as Iyagana is presented as the tempter of Bishop, and Venyil’s uncles are seen as sinners for furthering the ancestor’s worship cult. It is my opinion that the playwright allows these characters in order to have balance of representation of faith since there are family members in Nigeria who prefer the indigenous religious pull to the new religion.

Having dwelled on explaining that Esu does not represent the same force of evil as *The Bishop*, it is important to clarify that the religion of ancestors’ worship does not confer on the practitioners the status of “bad people” and “devil” as we have in *Uncle Venyil*:

Kaka: You spoil that boy. He is a no good. These bad people have spoilt him. He beats his drum for them now at their meetings.

Zwan: Mama, you used to like the boy. He was Venyil’s favourite.

Kaka: That was before he joined them. He was found in the latrine at the back of the church. One of those prostitutes had done it I am sure. Only God will judge. Then the church took him in, nursed him to life, taught him to play his drum for Jesus, but the bad people soon noticed him, and in order to make more money, he started to play his drum at their meetings. That was when we threw him out of the church and our homes. The devil uses him now. When Venyil comes, no more of his used clothes for him. I shall personally see to that. If he wants to drum for the devil, then let the devil feed and clothe his own.<sup>426</sup>

Kaka’s reference to the “boy is no good” is mainly because he plays drums at the ancestors’ cult meeting. She considers them as people who worship the

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<sup>424</sup> Osofisan, Femi, “Femi Osofisan: Formal Strategies and Social Commentary” in Jeyifo Biodun (ed.), *Modern African Drama* (New York: Norton Critical Editions, 2001), 616

<sup>425</sup> See Balogun, O.A., “The Nature of Evil and Human Wickedness in Traditional African Thought: Further Reflections on the Philosophical Problem of Evil” in *Lumina*, vol. 20, No.2. Oct. 2009, 7

<sup>426</sup> Yerima, Ahmed, *Uncle Venyil*, in *The Angel and Other Plays* (Ibadan: Kraft Books, 2004), 49-50

“devil”. So, to Kaka, people being “bad”, “no good” and the devil mean practicing a religion that is not Christianity. However, the contradiction in Kaka’s statement is “If he wants to drum for the devil, then let the devil feed and clothe his own.” Yerima did not balance the view of Kaka with a positive outlook or comment on the ancestors’ cult the same way he did not provide a balance presentation of Esu in *The Bishop*.

The setting for *Uncle Venyil* is the Tarok community and the Orim cult which Kaka refers to as “bad people meeting” and the “devil”. In order to clearly understand the Tarok people, known traditions of the people need to be highlighted. The Taroks are an ethno-graphically distinctive people in Langtang-North, Langtang-South, Wase, Mikang and Kangke Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Plateau State in central Nigeria. However, they can also be found in other LGAs like Shendam, Qua'an-Pan, Kanam and Pankshin in the state. Outside Plateau State, the Tarok can be seen conducting their farming occupation in Nasarawa and Taraba states. The ancestors (referred to as Orim by the Tarok) are “essentially a powerful male society into which young men are initiated.”<sup>427</sup> According to research conducted by Roger Blench “The Tarok are overwhelmingly Christian, although traditional religion also plays an important role in maintaining social order.”<sup>428</sup> This religion that Blench refers to is Orim cult into which all adult males are initiated. One of the major functions of the cult is to maintain order in the Tarok community. Tarok society is strongly patrilineal and has highly authoritarian attitudes to women. In order to make sure women are respectful and submissive to their husbands and to also comport themselves well in the community, Orim places fines on any erring woman. The fine is to force the woman involved to cook food for the cult.

In *Uncle Venyil*, Kaka is “fined” for disrespecting her late husband’s family. However, she considers the “fine” ridiculous because, according to her Christian view, cooking for the ancestors amounts to her accepting the traditional cult. At the end, when the pull of the traditional religion becomes too strong in her family, she capitulates and agrees to do the cooking. Yerima’s presentation of African cultural and religious beliefs in both *The Bishop* and

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<sup>427</sup> Blench, Roger and Dendo, Mallam, “The Coded language of the Orim, the ancestral spirit of the Tarok of Central Nigeria” A paper presented at the conference on “Spirit, Languages, Silence and Secrecy African Secret Languages. Köln, December 2-3rd, 2005.

<http://www.rogerblench.info/RBOP.htm>

<sup>428</sup> Blench, Roger and Dendo, Mallam, “The Coded language of the Orim, the ancestral spirit of the Tarok of Central Nigeria” A paper presented at the conference on “Spirit, Languages, Silence and Secrecy African Secret Languages. Köln, December 2-3rd, 2005.

<http://www.rogerblench.info/RBOP.htm>

*Uncle Venyil* is contrary to Tunde Awosanmi's conclusions that African artists use their artistic creation as a conscious ideological resistance against the dominating vistas of "colonialism and neocolonialism."<sup>429</sup> Awosanmi argues that in the "process of re-animation of antiquity, African pristine figures have been engaged in social and political discourses as interrogators-a post-modern rite of resurrecting pre-colonial metaphysical and the communal significances."<sup>430</sup> In both *The Bishop* and *Uncle Venyil*, the pre-colonial indigenous cultural and spiritual beliefs and communal significances are highlighted but still interpreted in the light of imposed notions and ideas, therefore, not yet represented unbiasedly. In the *The Bishop*, Iyagana, Bishop's paternal aunt puts the Bishop in a hypnotic position with her esoteric power. In *Uncle Venyil*, Venyil the protagonist, while in the process of seeking power to avenge himself of the punisher who was his tormentor, crossed the imaginary divide of the physical to the spiritual realm of the Orim cult<sup>431</sup> and became possessed by the power of his ancestors:

Kaka: ...at the compound, my son became an animal. With one swift move, like an eagle, he perched on a white cockerel. And in a wild dance, he went to the ancestral shrine, where like a lioness, he bit off the head of the cockerel. He drank the blood, oh God, my son drank the blood of the dying cockerel, still jerking, still twisting. Then wildly he bathed himself, Boyi and the shrines in blood. Boyi started to beat his little drum first in one slow rhythm, you should have seen my son dance. Gradually, he started to spin like one possessed, until he fell, exhausted, [...] my son. He is theirs now. They will initiate him into their cult.<sup>432</sup>

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<sup>429</sup> Awosanmi, Tunde, "Myth, Mimesis and the Pantheon in Nigerian Literary Drama" in *Muse and Mimesis: Critical Perspectives on Ahmed Yerima's Drama* (Ibadan: Spectrum, 2007), 284

<sup>430</sup> Awosanmi, Tunde, "Myth, Mimesis and the Pantheon in Nigerian Literary Drama" in *Muse and Mimesis: Critical Perspectives on Ahmed Yerima's Drama* (Ibadan: Spectrum, 2007), 284

<sup>431</sup> Orim, the ancestors, among the Tarok people of east-central Nigeria. The singular form, ùrim, is applied to a dead person or an ancestor, while orim refers to the collective ancestors and the cult itself. Men above a certain age are allowed to enter the grove and engage with the ancestors. These inhabit the land of the dead and are thus in contact with all those who have died, including young people and children who were not admitted to the orim. On certain nights when the 'orim are out', women and children must stay in their houses. See Roger Blench: The secret language of the orim, Tarok ancestors. A paper presented at "Spirit, Languages, Silence and Secrecy" African secret languages conference, Köln, Germany. (December 2-3rd, 2005), 5. Post conference draft, 2005. <http://www.rogerblench.info/Language%20data/Niger-Congo/Benue-Congo/Plateau/Tarokoid/Tarok/Tarok%20papers/Tarok%20secret%20language.pdf>

<sup>432</sup> Yerima, *Uncle Venyil*, 69

After witnessing the action of Venyil, Kaka accepts the indigenous religion as having a stronger pull on the people. Although she had resolved earlier not to acknowledge the religion, she capitulates and accepts to prepare the food as demanded by her in-laws:

Kaka: Gone to join them. My own son ... who was baptized in the spirit of Jesus, gone to join them. The gods forbid! Before my eyes, he crossed the threshold, he embraced my shame, making my belief a laughing stock.<sup>433</sup>

In a split moment Kaka crossed the threshold with “The gods forbid!” The threshold is that imaginary line between the indigenous religious belief and the Christian faith. Kaka surrenders to the Orim cult when she asks Azwan to call his in-laws to come for Venyil:

Kaka: I must have prayed too long. Azwan, go call the fathers of the house. Tell them their first says they should come for their son. Hurry, woman, hurry.<sup>434</sup>

She had initially refused the title “first wife” from the so-called “fathers of the house” based on her Christian faith. The duty of the first wife is to welcome the masquerade of the ancestors’ cult and prepare meals for all the members that visit her or the family compound on that day. Kaka’s speech of “I must have prayed too long.” simply means that she has practiced Christianity for such a long time that she has forgotten the power inherent in the indigenous spiritual belief. In the play, this realization is to explain that the ancestral belief lurks in the sub-consciousness of most professed African Christians. It is ever present, though made docile and unacknowledged until a big travail causes it to resurface.

The process of crossing the threshold from the physical realm to the spiritual one happens in a trance-like state without the characters being in total control of their physical state. In case of the Bishop, he is able to break loose because of the presence of dual spiritual forces, one of which he is in full-consciousness and the other lurking in the periphery until Iyagana brought it forth. The fact that Bishop is accustomed to transcending the plane was not sufficient to hold him back until Rev. Father Emmanuel intercepted Iyagana in

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<sup>433</sup> Yerima, *Uncle Venyil*, 67

<sup>434</sup> Yerima, *Uncle Venyil*, 76

her quest. Father Emmanuel, the Bishop's Curate, is not just a physical being but a representation of Christ himself in the life of the Bishop. Yerima deliberately situates him in the play to serve as the Bishop's guarding angel since human's flesh is considered weak by the Bible. He comes to the Bishop's rescue anytime he is too weak to help himself; the first time when he (Bishop) is almost raped by a sister. The sister had earlier inflicted an injury on the Bishop for failing to respond to her love advances. At a public function to which Bishop was invited, the lady attacked him and, in the process, inflicted injury to his head. Though it was concluded that the sister is mentally ill, she says that her action was based on an affection she has for the Bishop which he refused to reciprocate. The second time Father Emmanuel rescues the Bishop, he stops Iyagana's onslaught on him.

The spiritual plane is introduced again in *The Angel* when the assassinated politician, Chief appears to Otunba as an angel. Both Otunba and the late Chief begin a conversation which centres on the pain Rachel, Otunba's sick wife, who is suffering on her sick bed. Their second discussion is the inability of the Nigerian police to arrest the person responsible for Chief's murder. In this scene, Yerima's breaks the wall of the two parallel worlds of the dead and of the living appealing to the belief that anyone who dies before his appointed time by Olodumare will remain on the surface of the earth as a "Akudaaya"<sup>435</sup>, until he fulfills his days on earth. The belief in Akudaaya also stipulates that the deceased will not rest if he has an important message to deliver to a loved one. Until the message is delivered, he will continue to roam on the surface of the earth even though he has been buried. In this case, Chief wants to meet with his wife in order to reveal the identity of his killer. Otunba becomes the messenger who conveys Chief's message to his wife and sister:

Chief: As you spoke, my mind wandered to my own family. My wife and my children. We had big plans, and now all this happened. (*Pause*) My wife ... can you help me call her please?<sup>436</sup>

After the "Akudaaya" represented by Chief has had his message delivered, he will depart and finally "rest in peace".

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<sup>435</sup> Akudaaya, within the Yoruba world refers to a man/woman who died from an unnatural course, especially before his or her time. He/she will remain on the earth, but away to some place where nobody knew of his/her death. See Matory, J.L., *Sex and the empire that is no more: Gender and the Politics of Metaphor in Oyo Yoruba Religion* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 126

<sup>436</sup> Yerima, *The Angel*, 31



## Characters

The plays discussed here have a minimal number of characters ranging from two in *The Twists* (Rev. Noah and Otunba Ojuolape) to seven in *The Wives* and eight in *The Mirror Cracks*. However, *Uncle Venyil* has a fairly large number of characters. Along with the thirteen visible characters are drummers, dancers and masquerades. Despite the fairly large number of characters, the play revolves more around Kaka and her two children: Venyil and Zwan, and Boyi the young drummer. The characters of the plays are drawn from different strata of society. Though all the plays set out to communicate a common message and employ similar forms, the settings are very diverse. This is not to mean that some of the plays do not share related settings.

Apart from *Uncle Venyil*, whose characters are drawn from among the ordinary members of the society, the others mainly have characters that belong to the middle political class of society. This suggests that, in Yerima's plays there is a clear attempt at constructing plays based on class consciousness. His plays emphasize social groupings: evidence of elite culture is pronounced. For example, when the play discusses the lower members of the society, the characters are drawn from that particular segment of the society. Elite culture during the first decades of independence in most societies of Africa (Nigeria included) revolved around the close "connection between education, state power, and personal wealth"<sup>437</sup>, which is what Yerima reveals in his plays. Chief Gbadegesin in *The Wives* is a member of the highly influential secret (Ogboni) cult. As a very high chief in the community he gravitates within the government circle, and, upon his death, the family is presented with the national flag by the government. One of his three wives is the Chief Executive Officer of a successful commercial bank; in that regards, she represents women empowerment. The rest of Chief's wives, especially Tobi, the youngest who was an air hostess before her marriage to Chief, loved to travel around the world for shopping.

Chief's younger sister Antimi, who is later discovered to be the mother of his first child (Lawyer Akande), is regarded as a committed woman and strength to the other women. Antimi explains that the act of incest happened when she was a teenager living with her brother who had taken to alcohol on a particular night after he lost his job. The action which they both later regretted took place under the influence of alcohol. Antimi did not say if the incestuous act was committed on her under violent circumstances as Gbadegesin was

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<sup>437</sup> Chazan, N., Mortimer, R., Ravenhill, J., Rothchild, D., *Politics and Society in Contemporary Africa*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Reinner Publishers, 1992), 86

drunk. After the birth of their child, Chief Gbadegesin lied to Antimi saying that the child that resulted from the incest affair was a stillbirth. It was unbeknown to her that the child is Lawyer Akande, Chief's personal lawyer trained in the United Kingdom.

In *The Wives*, Baba Ajagbe and Ifagbemi-two elderly men from the village-are the only people who do not belong to the upper class of the society. Notwithstanding, they both belong to the powerful Ogboni cult to which Chief was a member until his death. The two Chiefs represent the belief in the indigenous faith of the Yorubas.

*The Twist* has two characters: Otunba Ojuolape and Rev. Noah. Otunba Ojuolape is a successful lawyer and former adviser to the president of the country. He was born into the most influential family of Lagos society. He studied law at Oxford and Cambridge and sent his late son Dolapo to the same institutions. The second character Rev. Noah is an influential clergy man of the Anglican faith within Lagos society. He has been in this capacity for almost forty years. As a prominent Anglican Priest he is part of the people who are highly connected in the society because many of the politicians and aristocrats worship in his parish.

The seven characters in *The Mirror Cracks* are from diverse backgrounds. Gabi, Supo's father, was an ambassador; Tundun, the mother, is a senior judge of the Court of Appeal. They represent the aristocratic class, like Otunba Ojuolape in *The Twist* and Chief Gbadegesin in *The Wives*. Their son Supo attended the University of Oxford. Both Gabi and Tundun paid more attention to their career after they separated. Supo was only six years old when the parents separated. He grew up with Joseph (Gabi's domestic house help) and his family. Even Bishop Gerald, Tundun's elder brother and Gabi's best friend, did not give Supo, who happened to be his godson much attention in his formative years. The remaining characters are Daku, the representative of the Federal Military Government who presents Supo's posthumous awards to his parents; Hawa, Supo's sixteen year old fiancé; and Tade his best friend.

There are six characters in *The Bishop*: the Bishop, Archbishop Tiku, the young Rev. Father Emmanuel, two parishioners and Iyagana, the Bishop's aunty. In *The Angel*, we also have six characters: Otunba and his sickly wife Rachel who remains on her sick bed until the last moment of the play. There are Dr. Tela, and Chief-a recently murdered politician who is seen only by Otunba. The manner of the late Chief's appearance is why Otunba regards him as an angel from heaven. Towards the end of the play, Patricia and Jope Chief's wife and sister appear. Jope is considered by Chief as an aggressive woman

who, like the doubting Thomas of the Bible, will not believe anything until she has a fact or experienced it.

Due to the socio-economic placement of the characters and the fact that the plays record activities that occur in a single day, there is no variation in the characters or any other development than the one present at the opening of the plays. Yerima, being conscious of the elitist and materialistic culture of his characters and the taste of the class they belong to, gives the same name to almost all the main characters of the different plays. They are addressed by their title in society, for example, Chief, Otunba, Bishop, Reverend, Ambassador, and so on.

### **Language**

In the analyzed plays are simple poetic and parabolic language laden with metaphor. In the plays studied, simple and easy to understand English language is used as the communicating tool. Though, in some circumstances, there seems to be an illogical dialogue from a particular character. For example, in the scene where Venyil's describes his suffering in detention to his mother is incomprehensible in *Uncle Venyil*:

Venyil: (*Lost in thought, as if in a trance*) He was always there ... like a watchful hungry wicked vulture ... he was always there. As if they wanted you to know who your "Father punisher" was. His icy photograph adorned every room. I saw it, and hated him. I saw it until I transferred my pain to the thought of hurting him one day. I lost my being, my humanity, in the kicks of their boots. For exchange, I gained this animal you see before you. I wanted so very much to die sometimes, and yet, his face kept me going ... my bile ... the strand of life ... cocoon in the shell of my own self-destruction.

Kaka: I am sorry, son ...

Venyil: And at nights, for the nights were worse, the cold air brought in the ghosts. For a long time, I did not know them, neither did they bother to speak with me. But we were always there. Keeping a cold watch of each other. I, the living, they, the dead.

Kaka: I am sorry, son ...

Venyil: Then one night we could not take it any longer. We started to talk. They had wandered into my world, and I was the guest in the

valley of cold existence. Ah, Mama ... I saw the nakedness of the mind.<sup>438</sup>

Kaka's interjection of "I am sorry, son" reveals her state of mind on hearing the suffering of Venyil, yet it portrays her as someone who is detached from the conversation. Venyil's speech presents him as a character on the brink of psychological breakdown. A constant strand is repetition of words. Incoherency and repetition are also consistent in *The Angel* when Otunba talks with the family doctor Tela, and even with Chief:

Otunba: She hates white (*He walks past Tela, opens the door to the bedroom, and comes out with a coloured wrapper. He covers her up.*) She hates white. There. She lies like a rose flower.

Tela: You need to eat.

Otunba: (*Lost in thought*) We got married on a wet day, you know? It rained that day as if it was not going to stop. As if all the angels in heaven were praying at the same time. It rained also each time she had our children. (*Pause. With tearful voice*) I heard it even rained the day Christopher, our son, was buried. (*Chuckles, still in pain*) Christopher and water. He never liked water when he was a baby. Each time he would struggle and fight his mother and aunties before having his wash. And there he was, buried in a wet grave, on a wet day. And he could not even say a word. (*He begins to cry. Tela watches him for a while and goes to him.*)

Tela: It is okay.

Otunba: It started after Christopher's death, you know?

Tela: What?

Otunba: Rachel's sickness. It started after we received news of his death. It killed a part of her. He had always been her favourite. She hated the twins because they gave so much problems at birth. They even tore her womb as they came out. She gave him her love, her time ...everything, and when he died, it was as if she had willed her own death too. She blamed everybody for his death.<sup>439</sup>

Like Venyil in *Uncle Venyil*, Otunba becomes incoherent when he jumps from Rachel's hatred of white colour (white colour here has no relation to racial

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<sup>438</sup> Yerima, *Uncle Venyil*, 66

<sup>439</sup> Yerima, *The Angel*, 18.

discourse), to their getting married on a wet day, having her children when rain falls, Christopher's dislike for water and being buried in a wet grave, to Rachel's hatred of her twin children. The statement is both disjointed and illogical. Albeit, in reality, man is often found in this complex web of irrationality when he is trying to suppress a pain or simply looking for an outlet to be purged of a bottled-up emotions.

The characters in the analyzed plays are not separated by language as we often see with most Nigerian plays. It is a common factor in Nigerian drama for domestic staff characters and those with little or no formal education to speak NPE or code-switching between English and the indigenous language. Yerima on the contrary, did not try to elevate one character above the other, except in *The Bishop*. Even when Reverend Father Emmanuel is portrayed as a timid and naïve character in relation to the vivacious nature of the Bishop, the subordinated position of the character is not achieved in language. Rev. Father Emmanuel merely discusses his admiration of Bishop's philosophical poems and other writings by reciting the words of the poems to him. Iyagana in *The Bishop*, as an acolyte of Esu, is steeped in the esoteric language of her indigenous religion. She is similar to the two elderly men in *The Wives* who are Priest of Orunmila. Both Iyagana and the two men use chants, incantations and proverbs to communicate with other characters.

The genre the plays belong to is dark comedy; the plays maintain fluctuating moods because of the subject they all treat. The treatment of death, pain and incest presents a melancholic feeling and a sense of fear in the reader-audience. For example, from the beginning of *The Wives* to the end, Chief Gbadegesin's coffin remains at a corner of the room. Antimi constantly sprays perfume on the corpse. Her reason for the action is to douse the stench from the decomposing body.

On an ethical ground, incest is considered an immoral act or taboo by many religions and societies in Nigeria. To discuss it freely in *The Wives* in a society that treats such an act as taboo is to tell the people that it exists within the society. For a lucid interpretation of the plays for different strata of audience and the playwright's awareness of government censorship for politically assertive plays, Yerima situates his works within a domestic environment. As the plays are not to be taken at face value, the language used is metaphorical yet the message being communicated by the plays is easily decipherable by those who have some mediocre knowledge of Nigerian history.

The title, *The Mirror Cracks*, is a metaphor which I find easier to explain as representing, Gabi, Tundun and Supo's true identity. Supo is a

bundle of contradictions and does not reflect his father's gentlemanly disposition, which is what people believe him to be. This suggests that things are not always as they seem, and every human being has his own identity. The crash of a symbolic mirror in the play shortly before Tade reveals what Supo had always been and what he later became in Sierra Leone is a suggestion of this:

Gabi: Oh, the army say[s] he died well. That is alright by me. But Tade, you were there, you saw him last alive. What really happened?

Tade: Well, sir ...

(There is a clash of a mirror cracking upstairs. Tundun screams....)<sup>440</sup>

The crash of the mirror, though an accident by Tundun, is aimed to draw the audience to the vagaries of man and to the deceit in human existence.

Tundun: Yes, clumsy me. It was the funny mirror in my room. It made me look fatter, monstrous. I thought I could fix it. But it fell off the hook as I moved closer. I cut my little finger trying to save it. It cracked into tiny little pieces.

Gabi: (Manages a laugh) So you met Supo's funny mirror. He bought it in Spain for my sixty-four[th] birthday. It was the card that came with it that really made me laugh. It read "things are not always what they seem. If you think you are great, look at the mirror and see how awful you could have been."<sup>441</sup>

The metaphor of the mirror and the crack are enhanced by the irony in Tundun's reflection after seeing herself in it, the laughter of Gabi, and the message of the card, the meaning of which both Tundun and Gabi did not decipher.

### **Thematic Pre-occupation**

As is clear now the representation of religion is a major theme in these works. However, hypocrisy of both the Christian and ATBs religious practitioners is evident. Many of the characters follow a particular religion based on the material satisfaction to be derived from it. The majority of the characters in all of the plays, indeed, profess the loyalty to the Christian doctrine but clandestinely follow the ATBs for instantaneous solutions to problems. Even

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<sup>440</sup> Yerima, *The Mirror Cracks*, 130

<sup>441</sup> Yerima, *The Mirror Cracks*, 130

those with traditional chieftaincy titles prefer to be associated with Christianity so as not to be regarded as pagan. To be known as Christian is to be socially accepted even when the person is a sceptic like Kaka in *Uncle Venyil*. She is a typical example of most Nigerian Christians whose reason for going to church is the opportunity it affords to wear new clothes on Sunday and to secure a church burial at death. Like Otunba in *The Angel* and Gabi and Tundun in *The Mirror Cracks*, going to church as a wealthy individual and providing financially to church project guarantees you and your family a permanent seat in the church. At the same time, the works extensively discuss the importance of indigenous cultural and religious beliefs to the Nigerian society. Kaka's returning to cook for the ancestors' cult members in *Uncle Venyil* is a way to keep the practice alive.

Women's emancipation is portrayed in *The Wives* and *The Mirror Cracks*. In order to attain an enviable position, Cecelia separated from Chief Gbadegesin as his second wife to pursue a successful banking career and rises to the position of Chief Executive. In *The Mirror Cracks*, Tundun becomes a senior judge of the Appeal Court (the second highest court in Nigeria). At the death of Chief Gbadegesin, the rest of the women, rather than be in mourning, dance and drink to celebrate their emancipation from the stranglehold of marriage. While their husband was alive, they were like his properties.

Fate as a theme often occurs in many of Yerima's plays. Its presence in these religious realist dramas is poignant. Yerima employs critical questioning of the existence of man in relation to his essence in these plays.

In *The Twist*, Rev. Noah has the fate of being the father of a child who becomes a condemned armed robber. Furthermore, the boy is going to face execution as a result of his action. Fate deals the Reverend a heavier blow when it comes to light that the murdered victim was a son he never knew he had. The victim was a product of his relationship prior to his becoming a Reverend gentleman forty years before. He had requested his young lover to abort the pregnancy as he was going to the seminary. Also Chief Gbadegesin's incestuous act with his sister in *The Wives* is as a result of fate. In these two works, Yerima uses fate to discuss moral subjects. Morality is another constant issue in these works: the questioning of man's reaction, action or inaction as being good or evil. Incest is a condemnable act on the ground of morality by many religions of the world. The Yoruba society considers it a taboo with many consequences. Baba Ajagbe and Ifagbayi who are from the village, after seeing Chief Gbadegesin's corpse are quick to note that Chief's swollen corpse is a result of having committed an abomination. On moral grounds, in *The Mirror*

*Cracks*, Supo was evil; Bishop Daku, Gabi and Tundun, and Kaka in *Uncle Venyil* are all hypocrites; Chief Gbadegesin in *The Wives* was morally bankrupt. He (Chief Gbadegesin) believed that by pretending to be a Christian while at the same time holding a high position in the indigenous secret cult, he could cover his many atrocities. More pronounced in these works is the conception of God as the author of good and evil, pain, sickness, accident, and ultimately death. This explains why Otunba Durosimi accuses God as the one who gives his wife “so heavy a cross”<sup>442</sup> of sickness to bear.

Otunba: ... First, her legs, now she finds it difficult to even breathe. They say only one of her kidney works now. Father, do something. Can't you do something to help her get better? [...] Send something, Father. Send us a miracle, Father, save Rachel ...save my beautiful jewel. You give her so heavy a cross to bear. She is weak. She has never been too strong. She has given you too much to carry this heavy cross.<sup>443</sup>

Thematically, these plays further dissect Nigerians festering problems where everyone, especially serious agents of change, connives with visible opposition to the societal goods in making life difficult for the people. Conspiracy and deception are, thus, part of the thematic thrust of these plays. In *The Bishop*, despite the Bishop's hallowed position and his objective of building a god-fearing youth for the nation, government would not allow such a gesture. Government agency demolishes the Sunday school building Bishop uses with the claim that it is built on a piece of land that belongs to the government. For daring to challenge the government demolition agents in the pursuance of their duty, the Bishop is arrested by the police in the full glare of television journalists and remanded in detention.

On the other hand, when we consider the deception in *The Mirror Cracks* and *The Wives*, we are left with two dead people, Supo and Otunba, who both died believing that they have succeeded in covering their evils and negative deeds from being known to people around them and the world in general. Yet at death, every secret comes into the open before their burial.

Revenge is another point raised in the plays. Rev. Noah in *The Twist* attempts to use his position as a reverend to prevail on Otunba Ojuolape to get a government pardon for his condemned son. However, Otunba Ojuolape

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<sup>442</sup> Yerima, Ahmed, *The Angel and Other Plays* (Ibadan: Kraft Books, 2004), 11

<sup>443</sup> Yerima, Ahmed, *The Angel and Other Plays* (Ibadan: Kraft Books, 2004), 11



declined wanting an eye for eye, so, he refuses to demand for the life of his son's murderer to be spared when he gets the opportunity to do so. Venyil's ultimate intention of avenging his incarceration leads to his joining of the ancestors' cult. In *The Angel*, the purpose for the murdered Chief's appearance to Otunba is to reveal the identity of his murderer to his wife, Patricia, and his sister, Jope, so that he can be punished for his crime. The murderer is Chief's younger brother whose motive is the appropriation of the deceased's property. Chief releases the evidence needed to the women and asks them to give the evidence to the authority in order to allow that the law take its course and convict the murderer. In *The Mirror Cracks*, the late Supo, in order to avenge the death of some soldiers under his command becomes an animal, killing ruthlessly both the rebels and non-rebels.

### **Socio-Political Contextualization of Texts**

A clash of religion can be detected in all of the plays studied in this chapter. The assumption among Christianized Nigerians that ATBs is the celebration of pagan and heathen culture causes opposition between the two religions. Contemporary Nigerian Clergies are quick to point out to people that relinquishing ATBs for Christianity is what the Bible refers to as "being born again". In *The Angel*, Yerima is able to talk about the Nigerian police's failure to resolve cases of the assassinations of politicians in the country since the return to democratic governance. Yerima says in *The Bishop* that, "it is difficult to draw a line between politics and religion." This is because the church would rather keep a sinner who commits to the "work of God" for financial gain than a pious Reverend Father who is overly concerned with righteousness.

Elevation into higher rank and posting to a lucrative Parish by the efforts of "godfathers" are more important than soul-winning. These are visibly displayed in *The Bishop*, *Uncle Venyil*, *The Wives*, as well as in *The Twist*. Reverend Noah, in *The Twist*, explains:

Noah: In my parish, what amazed me was how upright men, deacons, church workers, were willing to give up their souls for positions. [...] Those who had joined the secret cult and lost the elections, came dejected, they came to make confessions of their trials...<sup>444</sup>

Money, rather than salvation of the human soul from eternal condemnation as the Bible instructed is considered by many Nigerians as the hallmark of

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<sup>444</sup> Yerima, Ahmed, *The Twist*, in *The Angel and Other Plays*, 94

Christianity in the country. It is important to reiterate the fact that in *The Angel*, *The Bishop*, *Uncle Venyil*, *The Wives*, as well as in *The Twist*, Christianity's subjugation of ATBs and other cultural practices like polygamy are considered as a continuum of Euro-American colonization of Nigeria. For example, some of the churches like the Cherubim and Seraphim, and Aladura Churches who synthesize some aspects of ATBs into their worship, are considered un-Christian churches, meaning that, for immediate response to the needs of most Nigerian Christians, the indigenous spiritual realms seem more reliable than their Christian spiritual realm.

Christianity for this set of people means a system to be used in order to secure a position in the here-after, while indigenous belief is for here-and-now. So, for many of them, there is no harm in practicing two different religions, and if it is needed, one can synthesize the two opposing beliefs. As I have mentioned above, some of the Churches will not take kindly to a member who flagrantly follows ATBs. Also in this case, the socio-economic position of the person plays a very important role and churches appear hypocritical. In *Uncle Venyil*, the church will not bury Anthony because he is polygamous and also a member of the ancestors' cult. However, the Bible did not say that polygamy is sinful in any way. Apostle Paul only recommends monogamy to the people seeking to be Bishop and Deacons in the church.<sup>445</sup> To deny Anthony a church burial on the ground of his marriage has no biblical corroboration. On the contrary, the same church will bury Supo, an embodiment of contradiction in *The Mirror Cracks*. Supo not only lies by portraying a Christian side to his parents and their friends, but he also killed and raped innocent people in Sierra Leone where he had gone as a peace-keeping envoy. Even when the Bishop is aware that he fornicated with a sixteen year old teenager, the position of his parents in society as an ambassador and a high court judge guarantees Supo a church burial.

Yerima uses *The Mirror Cracks* to comment on the activities of various peace-keeping organizations, using Economic Communities of West African State Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) as a focus. Among many other atrocities, the peace-keeping group was accused of committing heinous acts like looting, rape, killing and destruction of properties. Hawa narrates her experience, thus:

Hawa: He ordered his men out and as he dropped my mother, even I knew the end had come. Silently, she began to cry in our language, that I should not try to help her. The language infuriated him the more. He

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<sup>445</sup> See The *Holy Bible* King James Version, I Timothy 3:1-12

raped her and with the pistol, my father's pistol, he shot her in the head at close range. [...] All I remembered later was finding myself at the back of his jeep in handcuffs.<sup>446</sup>

Hawa's revelation to Supo's parents is also corroborated by Tade, Supo's best friend and colleague in the army:

Tade: Yes. It was a cold Friday morning. There had been an uneasy calm in Freetown. There was only one bank operating downtown Freetown. And reports had reached us that a group of rebels had robbed the bank killing all the officials. Every available man was drafted. A major had been asked to lead us. We double-crossed the men, killing everyone of them. We had also captured their loot intact. Then came the argument about what we were to do with the loot. Only twelve of us survived the operation out of some twenty-five men. Supo wanted us to keep some of the money, but the Major wanted everything returned. The argument became heated, and Supo drew his pistol and shot down the officer.<sup>447</sup>

Tade reveals further:

When we got to the camp, we all told a cock and bull story and Supo was rewarded with a promotion for his gallantry.<sup>448</sup>

Apart from these atrocious acts in *The Mirror Cracks*, reports on the West African peace-keeping groups are replete in the play. During both the Liberian civil war of the 1990s and Sierra Leonean war of 2000s, peace-keeping groups are accused of looting and corruption. According to Stephen Ellis:

Throughout the mission, corruption and organized looting by ECOMOG troops led some Liberians to re-coin the acronym ECOMOG as "Every Car or Movable Object Gone." Stephen Ellis reports one of the most egregious examples as being the total removal of the Buchanan iron ore processing machinery for onward sale while the Buchanan compound was under ECOMOG control.<sup>449</sup>

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<sup>446</sup> Yerima, *The Mirror Cracks*, 126

<sup>447</sup> Yerima, *The Mirror Cracks*, 133

<sup>448</sup> Yerima, *The Mirror Cracks*, 132-133

<sup>449</sup> Ellis, Stephen, *The Mask of Anarchy* (New York: NYU Press, 2006). Updated Edition

Yerima also captures the irony inherent in the national awards and honours bestowed on individuals by the government and some organizations in society. The awards are presented to questionable characters, like to Supo in *The Mirror Cracks*:

Daku: (In a formal tone.) Your excellency and your Lordship, on behalf of the Head of State and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, and also on behalf of the Supreme Commander of the Joint ECOMOG forces serving in Sierra Leone, [...] I present you both the Award of Gallantry and Military Leadership earned by your son ... for laying down his life well and beyond the call of duty.[...] On behalf of the Federal Military government, I am to present the Posthumous National Award of the Officer of the Federal Republic of Nigeria for outstanding service to the nation. [...] Please accept our condolence. Major Adegabi was a first-class officer and an international hero....<sup>450</sup>

Here, Yerima derides the awards of both military and national honours to an officer reputed for mercilessly killing his superior and the people he is sent to protect. This is a risky venture for Yerima who, at this point, is working in a government owned institution. In Nigeria where Yerima resides, almost all the awardees of national honours worked for the government in the capacity of heading a ministry, parastatal or commission of inquiry which are riddled with corruption allegations. The majority of the awardees are noted for ruthlessly enriching themselves to the detriment of the Nigerian masses. In *The Mirror Cracks*, Yerima's authorial voice can be heard as Tade says that Supo starts to ask some fundamental questions before his death:

Tade: ...After a while he started to ask too many questions about why Nigeria was in the war; whose interest it was to have too many people die; why the gold and diamond of Sierra Leone people had become such an issue for international interest; why Liberia was fuelling the war; who were his real enemies. All this was wrong.<sup>451</sup>

Tade's speech refers to the involvement of Liberia in the Sierra Leone war and the fact that Charles Taylor's contribution to the illegal mining of the country's

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<sup>450</sup> Yerima, *The Mirror Cracks*, 121

<sup>451</sup> Yerima, *The Mirror Cracks*, 133

diamonds have been said to reinforce the rebels with arms' supplies used in perpetuating the most heinous crimes against humanity. According to Leo Cendrowicz, "Witnesses have also testified about arms smuggled from Liberia into Sierra Leone in sacks of rice and diamonds sent back in a mayonnaise jar."<sup>452</sup> However, Charles Taylor has vehemently denied the allegation of his involvement in the war in Sierra Leone even when his aides have confessed to it. Charles Taylor, the former President of Liberia was arrested in 2006 in Nigeria where he was in exile. He is currently being held in United Nations Detention Unit on the premises of Penitentiary Institution Haaglanden in The Hague, where he is standing trial before the Special Court for Sierra Leone because of his role in the civil war.<sup>453</sup>

## Conclusion

In order to effectively conclude this chapter it is pertinent not to lose sight of the paradox that is in both *The Twist* and *The Bishop*. The subject of divine law and of legal status appears when Rev. Noah and Bishop who both represent the Christian Divine law, are placed against the State law. While the Christian law recognizes forgiveness of sinners or criminals, Nigerian law stipulates death penalty for a first degree murder offender. In *The Twist*, Otunba Ojuolape as lawyer and the Governor who is a custodian of law represent opposition to the Christian law.<sup>454</sup> The state law on armed robbery and murder recognizes no religious order even when Rev. Noah attempted to influence the course of justice by employing antics of his religion:

Noah: (*Frantic, hysterical, Noah crawls to Ojuolape on his knees.*) by the grace, save him! Save my son, please. Save me from the shame of my church! Pick up the phone and save my son. The Lord has heard my prayers through you. Save him! (*Breaks down*) In the name of God, please! I beg you ...<sup>455</sup>

This is a clear example of how the influential members of the Nigerian societies attempt to manipulate the judicial system by employing wealth, political positions, religious and cultic affiliations to gain self advantages to the

<sup>452</sup> Cendrowicz, Leo, "Lie and Rumour: Liberia's Charles Taylor on the Stand", in *Times*, July 14, 2009 <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1910365,00.html#ixzz18DyBjcyD>

<sup>453</sup> Cendrowicz, Leo. Lie and Rumour: Liberia's Charles Taylor on the Stand, in *Times*. July 14, 2009. <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1910365,00.html#ixzz18DyBjcyD>

<sup>454</sup> Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (London: James Currey, 1986), 2

<sup>455</sup> Yerima, *The Twist*, 108

detriment of the less privileged members of society for whom the law must take its course.

In the case of *The Twist*, Otunba Ojuolape does not agree with Rev. Noah to pervert the cause of justice. As *The Twist* talks about a death sentence for armed robbers, the play lends its voice to the campaign against this aspect of Nigerian society on the execution of any criminal.

In conclusion, Nigerian religious problems are well articulated in these plays. Yerima's position on the fact that man's deeds shall be judged on earth even when he is dead is well captured in *The Twist*, *The Mirror Cracks*, *The Wives*, *The Angel* and *Uncle Venyil*. According to a popular maxim which Shakespeare utilized, "the evil that men do, live after them; the good is oft interred with their bones."<sup>456</sup> Their deeds are not forgotten even after they exit the physical plane. As Yerima revealed in some of these plays, death ought to be perceived as continuum of life and not as a termination of a cycle. For example, the appearance of the ghosts of Chief in *The Angel* and Ovievie in *Little Drops*, the discussion of the Chief Gbadegesin's deeds in *The Wives* and Supo's atrocities in *The Mirror Cracks* lend support to this argument. Within the Yoruba cyclical worldview described by Wole Soyinka as an unbroken link between the world of the dead, the living and the yet to be born, and spaces between each action,<sup>457</sup> death is no negation but a crossing over to the world of the ancestors.

Yerima discusses religion as an integral part of Nigerian society. Even with all of its contradictions it becomes necessary to look further at the social reality of his other works. Therefore, the idea of social-political realism in Yerima's theatre will be explored further in the next chapter of this thesis using other plays to support my argument that he is a politically aware playwright.

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<sup>456</sup> See William Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, Act III, Mark Anthony's eulogy of Caesar

<sup>457</sup> Soyinka, Wole, *Myth, Literature and the African World* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1976)