

Research Article

Even The Angel Eats Beans: The Sociological Examination of The White Man of God.

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Abstract: When the white man first came to Africa, some Africans saw him as an infallible super being sent directly from heaven to reform the society. Some other Africans; the incorruptible ones believed that the European had come simply to subjugate Africa. The disillusioned Africans jettisoned their own customs to follow the ways of the white. The European's religion gradually permeates every crannies of the African society till many Africans began to join hands to annihilate the Africa's religion. Centuries after the white man has left, his religion proliferates to the point that African religion is abysmally loathed by Africans. Kenjo Jumbam in his *The White Man of God*, is of the view that bitter kola does not taste in the mouth as it sounds. In this article, the researcher attempts the analysis of the ethnography of the Africa with the view of getting Africans appreciate the beauty of their tradition and the need to preserve them.

Keywords: Society, Tradition, Jumbam, European, White man, Paganism, Christianity.

INTRODUCTION

The White Man of God X-rays vividly the experiences of black Africans in the hands of the Europeans. It is an obvious fact that the European never had any penchant for black Africans and their traditions. Their coming to Africa heralded the loss of African culture; he came with the motif to impose his own tradition and religion on Africa. Many informed Africans who had the skills began to demonstrate the intention of the white in their novels, a way of making the African people understand why they must not allow themselves to be deceived. Chinua Achebe is an example of such dogmatic African and he has made it vivid in his novel, *Things Fall Apart*, that the European is smart and trickish. He says that Umuofia people were amused by the white man's foolishness; the white man has consented to build his house in the evil forest. Umuofia offered the forest to him to build his house there with the expectation that he would die in the evil forest. The perceived foolishness of the white man is ironically his wisdom and smartness. Achebe laments that because of the perceived foolishness of the white man, we allowed him to stay and now, he has put a sword in the things that held us together and we have fallen apart.

Jumbam Kenjo in *The White Man of God*, bemoans the insensitive action of the white man in subjugating the tradition of the black Africa. In the novel, he makes it categorical that the European tradition which African societies have been brainwashed to totally adapt to the detriment of their own tradition is characterized by a lot of imperfections and that in a number of ways, African way of life is better than some of the European's. The white man of God, via his actions, shows his gross disrespect for Africans and of course, to African culture. He beats elderly African people with impunity thus leaving the reader in wonder. The Bible he brought to Africa preaches respect for one's elders, so the white priest beating African elders rather shows his gross aversion for Africa and everything African. Earlier, Europeans had always demonstrated their ill belief about Africa. Okoh (2008), makes it glaring when he chronicles the views of early Europeans about Africa. He quotes George Hegel, a 19th century German philosopher as saying, "It is manifest that want of self-control distinguishes the character of the Negroes. This condition is capable of no development or culture... At this point we leave Africa, not even to mention it again, For it is no historical part of the world; it has no movement or development to exhibit" (12). He goes further to quote yet another European, Herodotus, a Greek geographer as describing Africa as "the land

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where huge serpents were found, and lions, and also wild men and wild women" (16).

Jumbam's Narrative Technique

Jumbam tells his tale through one of the characters, Tansa. Like in Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, Jumbam has used a child; a teenager who effectively tells the story from the viewpoint of an adolescent. Tansa, like Adichie's Jaja, comes from the family whose parents are converts of the new religion. Through the perspective of Tansa, we understand the experiences of especially African teenagers who actually witnessed the coming of the European culture and its clash with the African culture. Tansa says, "I had almost forgotten that I had to go to doctrine class. I usually stayed away from doctrine classes whenever Yaya came and she always defended me against mother" (4). This statement immediately reveals to the audience the fact that two authorities are in place in the society of the author. Tansa's mother, undoubtedly, is a chronic adherent of the new religion and Yaya, like Adichie's Papa Nnukwu, a traditionalist.

The Christian Religion and the Mystery of Hell

The concept hell fire is a mystery which came with the white man's tradition. The white man's religion stipulates that those who fail to obey the commandments of his God would burn eternally in hell. African religion on the other hand, believes that when someone dies, the person goes to another world where he becomes an ancestor that mediates between the living and the dead. African traditional worshippers believe that when they pray to God, they pray through the ancestors. The ancestors they believe, have become spirits and only spirits can talk to God, mortals don't. To them, hell, is only an illusion. This is made vivid in the novel with the argument of Yaya who believes that God lives somewhere up and that everyone who dies will get to him. According to Yaya, "But up where God lives is the best of places, the target for all things on the surface of the earth. When your body is put in the earth your breath begins its upward journey to God. Its speed depends on your life on the surface of the earth, the better, the faster. Even the slowest is better than us on earth because he is already on the way up" (37). By this statement, it is understood that the African religion does not believe that there is hell and does not believe also that God is so callous to cast human beings to the mysterious everlasting hell. Yaya argues that instead of causing human beings to suffer for ever in hell, God has rather made it possible that the dead be separated from the living and they become emissaries that mediate between the living and the dead. According to her, "That is why if you have a problem you must solicit your ancestors to plead to God for you." To consolidate her argument, she asks, "Whoever heard that the God who is the final hope of man puts him into eternal flames? How can God, being God, do that" (37).

The docile Africans who had been brainwashed by the Europeans, even when they are ignorant of the mystery of hell fire, still believe the white man. Mama would always wake Tansa up early in the morning to start going to the doctrine class where they are taught that those who fail to obey the strict regulations of the white man's God would burn perpetually in hell. Tansa fails to understand why God should allow one to burn for eternity in hell. However, in order not to fall a victim, he has always trekked a far distance even in a harsh weather to go to church. He has always gone for confession which he has been made to believe to be the only way one would be saved from hell fire.

This belief about hell fire remains a mystery to especially the pagans who, like Tansa, fail to understand why God of the white man's religion should be so callous as not to have mercy for the sinners. The mystery of confession also keeps Tansa wondering. As he embarks on the long trip to the church through the farm road, he encounters a squirrel dashing over the road into the bush. The squirrel had been eating carrots on the ridges. The thought of hell fire immediately came to his mind as he begins to sympathize with the poor squirrel. The novel shows the thought of the naïve boy as he hallucinates, "Do squirrels have their own church?" The author goes further to disclose the naivety of the poor boy who keeps wondering that perhaps the squirrel had been sent by his mother to go to church and he had come to steal carrots (7). The thoughts pervade his mind so he keeps pondering on that. In his soliloquy, we understand his naivety. Thus, "Do squirrels go to confession? This one had been stealing and if he did not confess his sin he would certainly go to hell-fire. That would be terrible" (7). The search for knowledge about hell fire, keeps Tansa more confused. He wonders what would be the fate of the squirrel if after stealing carrots, he meets his untimely death without having any time to confess his theft (7).

Exploitation by the Church

In Nkar, the setting of the novel, many have been converted to the white man's religion. The converted support their children in church activities. The white man gives the African man the illusion that it costs absolutely nothing to be a Christian. He condemns sacrifices and claims that Jesus has made the final sacrifice on the cross. Most Africans believe him and embrace his religion. It is surprising that a lot is required from the converts in Nkar. One of the characters, Widin narrates what she passes through in the white man's religion. She says, "I have sold all the cassava on my farm and also sold my two chickens, but the amount has just been barely enough to pay for my church contributions. And believe me I have not a drop of cooking oil in the house."

Most girls sell their bodies to men just to meet up. The white man has told them that once they confess their sins, they have been liberated. Another character,

Pauline says that in order to afford her own church contributions, she would be going to Bamenda to see her sister who lives there. The sister of hers sells palm wine and she makes it categorical what she does to earn money for the church contributions when she says, "Well, I helped her to sell her liquor. The men who work for the white men buy it like mad, especially when they receive their pay. They drink until late into the night and they do that everyday. Those people have money, I tell you. When the liquor is finished, you can make business with one of the men and you will be surprised what he gives you the next day" (17). Today in various societies in Africa, church and prayer houses have become lucrative business and that has given rise to the proliferation of churches and prayer houses in all the crannies of every societies. The members of the congregation are made to believe that the more they bring offerings and tithes to the church, the closer God is to them. Consequently, many people do anything possible to get money to give in their church so that their ways would be paved. Pastors and prophets become richer to the extent that some of them own private jets yet their followers wallow in penury. This is a serious issue that needs to be addressed for according to Emenyonu (1991), "The stage has now been reached when more serious issues in African literature have to be posed and explored (1). Novel, though a work of fiction, is an avenue where societal problem are addressed. Soyinka witnessed this malady and he squarely addressed it in his *Trials of Brother Jero*.

To Jumbam, our people are not only subtly robbed of their monies but their strength too. He writes that,

work in the Mission was shared according to age-groups. Men were to supply either goats or chickens or eggs and to load their guns with gunpowder. Women were to supply potatoes and food for the men who carried the luggage of the white man of God. Big girls were to clean the Mission and big boys were to plant flowers along the road and around the house of the white man of God. Small boys and girls were to water these flowers every morning and evening. If your own flowers died you were a bad child and Satan had eaten up your soul (30).

Tansa, the narrator says that he waters his own three times a day in order not to go to hell. One wonders why the white man should give such teaching that one whose flower dies goes to hell as if one deliberately causes the flower to die. This shows that the white man of God, like some other Europeans, are only interested in what they would gain from Africans and nothing more.

Pagans Are Not Agnostics

Yaya says to Tansa, "Before I was your age I had been taught all that. I was taught that if I do evil God will punish me. And everybody has a mind that tells him what is evil. Even a child like Micheal knows what

he shouldn't do" (91). Yaya's statement here goes to disclose that pagans are never agnostics as the white man has made us to believe that they are. One major strategy used by the white man to get docile Africans to his religion is abysmal condemnation of African traditions especially the African way of worship. They brainwashed the African to believe that their ways are barbaric and that unless they embrace the European's tradition, eternal damnation would be their portion. The European made Africans to believe that their way of worship was evil and in fact, that they were worshipping the devil and not God. Jumbam is of the view that it was especially, the Roman Catholic white priests who were such belligerent about African traditions. They were daring and used force to get Africans converted. Yaya, Tansa's grandmother who is yet to be converted, wonders why they should use force to convert. She reminisces how the first white missionaries (Anglicans) were subtle in getting Africans converted. She says, "When the white man came to conquer us, I was a small girl like Beri... The white man began a new religion but he did not force us into it although he conquered us. He did not force us to stop our own form of worship. I did not understand why children are punished when they go to our own sacrifice (36).

However, it is only ignorance that makes one believe that traditional worshippers are agnostics. Paganism is only a means of worshipping God just as Christianity and Islam are and so, it is only but an illusion to disparage the adherents as atheists. Before the Europeans came with their religion, our forefathers prayed to God. Yaya makes it vivid that Pagans did not hear of God for the first time from the missionaries when she says to his son in law, "You must consider what our own people say about God and creation. They say that when God made the world he divided it into two parts, the Up, where he lives, and the Down, where we are. Up where he lives you find such good things as the sun, the moon and the stars which give us light at different periods of the day, and the rain which falls on our crops at will. Down where we live he let's all types of crops grow and gives us animals for our use" (37). Yaya goes further to demonstrate the Pagan's belief that the dead become ghosts and that they mediate between the living and God. She says, "That is why if you have a problem you must solicit your ancestors to plead to God for you" (37). It therefore, appalls her why Africans should follow the European tradition which believes that the ancestors who should rather mediate between us and God would rather be put into perpetual perils. In confusion, she asks, "Whoever heard that God who is the final hope of man put him into eternal flames? How can God, being God, do that" (37)? Yaya fails to understand why our people should not be reasonable and understand that the white man only aimed to subjugate his own tradition when she says, "So I have been afraid that perhaps you are neglecting our own god for those of the white man and when our own god shall

turn his back on us those of the white man will not recognize us. That has been my fear.” Yaya of course, is not to be blamed for believing that there are different gods for she fails to understand why God of the white man should cast human beings into hell. She argues that our parents punish us when we err and forgive in a moment so to her, it is irrational that God who should be more compassionate should punish for ever without mercy.

Belief in Ghosts

Africans are not sceptical about the existence of ghosts. Although many people have not seen ghosts with their naked eyes, popular oral traditions have made it obvious that traditional Africans believed in ghosts. Ker (2004), says that writers were cultural nationalists in the years before independence, and in their words, tried to explain the traditions of their people to a largely hostile world. According to him, writers work in collaboration with historians, anthropologists, sociologists, and political scientists devoted to the task of giving back to Africa the pride and self-respect it lost during the colonial period (34). Lindfors (2002), observes that one of the most sensitive areas of African literary research, and one of the most abused and neglected, is that in which investigators search for evidence of folklore in literature (7). Achebe has the extraordinary ingenuity for integrating oral tradition in modern literature. This is why Lindfors (2002), says, "If ever a man of letters deserved his success, that man is Achebe (73). Achebe has in his "The Role of the Writer in a New Nation", advocated for integration of tradition in modern literature. Ker discloses that Achebe must be singled out, for his imaginative recreation of the Igbo society in *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and *Arrow of God* (1964) for making a more lasting impression than the works of his literary imitation and those of the anthropologists, historians and sociologists put together (34). Part of the tradition of the black African societies is the belief in ghosts. According to Nnyagu (2018), In our society today, it is no longer news to hear that somebody died and came back to live among the living. Ghosts are everywhere in the society. We encounter them on regular basis without knowing that the people we relate with are really ghosts. In every part of the African society, different versions of ghostlores are told.

As Tansa goes home from the church alone in the dark, he is gripped with fear as he remembers the story about Mr Night and Banla. It is a terrific ghost story which goes to consolidate the fact that Africans believe in ghost (97 – 98). The belief of African people that benevolent ghosts exist and hostile ones exist too is made vivid by Yaya when she says that people who commit some kind of atrocities, when they die, God punishes them in the spirit world. In her own words, "That is why we have wicked spirits. Wicked men, witches and magicians communicate with them" (54).

Christians' Aversion for Paganism

The Christians holy book has made it very clear that Christ did not come for the righteous but for the sinners to repent and come to God. The book of Matthew vivifies this with the plethora of parables to buttress the fact that God delights when a sinner repents. It is pathetic therefore, that the white missionaries who see themselves as the salt of the world would loath those believed to be unbelievers. The white man has taught African converts not to associate with Pagans else they would burn for eternity in hell. As Nwahunanya (2012) observes that the methods of the newly-converted Christians may have been fanatical, the African writer mirrors the converted as being so docile to the extent that they abhor even their close relations who refuse to be converted. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Papa Nnukwu in her *Purple Hibiscus* is seriously loathed by his own son because he isn't a Catholic Church convert. The hatred continues even at death. He leaves his father to die uncared for and when Auntie Ifeoma, who has not got the wherewithal to save the poor father comes to report the death, all he cares for is whether she called a priest to give him extreme unction. He makes it vivid, the aversion when he says, "I cannot participate in a pagan funeral" (195). Jumbam consolidates this fact with the type of punishment given to Tansa for participating in the sacrifice of the pagan. His mother says to him after she has thoroughly thrashed him, "Go to bed. You shall have no food this evening ... You will sleep alone" (29). This is similar to the punishment Eugene Achike, in *Purple Hibiscus*, gives to Jaja and Kambili for looking at masquerades during pagan's feast. Tansa's mother vivifies Christian's aversion for pagans when she adds, "You are the son of Satan, not mine. You preferred his food to mine, so go to bed at once (29). As if the punishment from the mother isn't enough, Tansa says that later in the day, Papa calls for him and they meet at his door and he grips his arm and breaks a branch of the eucalyptus trees from nearby. "Tell me," he said, "do I hear that you went to Mborn and took part in the sacrifice? Who told you to do that?" He describes how sever he is thrashed (35).

Despite the aversion Catholic Church has for paganism, pagans still give them supports in all that they do. In the recent past, when the church had their annual harvest and bazaar, they extended invitation to the pagans and they never failed to honour the invitation. As Jumbam puts it, "Dances continued. Men and women sat in small groups drinking palm wine. Food was served and we ate. There was feasting and making merry everywhere in the Mission. There were pagans too dancing and feasting with us" (49). In truth, the pagans' way need to be emulated and not the Christian's who preach one thing and in the next moment, they do contrary to what they have preached.

Proliferation of Churches in the Society

In the contemporary African societies, different churches abound. Though the churches use the same

holy book and they believe that Jesus Christ is the son of God and that he came to earth to redeem the earth, members of each church antagonize the other. Members of a particular denomination particularly, the Roman Catholic faithfuls refuse to marry to another and in most cases, when they do, parents of the bride are humiliated for allowing their children to marry outside their denomination. They are made to undergo some punishment as a way of atoning their sin. One therefore, wonders if each denomination has a different God from the other. Prabhupada (1999), says that the reason for the proliferation of churches is because Bible is subject to interpretation. He is of the view that sacred books should be read and plainly understood. To him, Hinduism and other religions remain singular because their holy books are not subject to interpretation. The Hindu holy book, *Bhagavadgita* for instance, has the clause "As it is" attached to it to show that it needs no interpretation. He believes that in Christianity, one reads the Bible and gives it a different interpretation from what used to be and he takes those who share his ideology out of the church to establish his own church. According to him, "There is no need to interpret the words of God" (38 – 39). As churches multiple, ills multiple too and the members of each denomination have intense aversion for the other. Members of the traditional religion have love for each other and they believe that when they do any harm to fellow beings, they would have the nemeses. Jumbam is aware of the hatred each denomination has for the other and he has aptly mirrored it in the novel. He portrays members of the Roman Catholic church as chauvinists who always delight in making caricature of the activities of the other churches. He writes that Tansa, Lukar, Tefan and Feliy would always stand to watch other denominations perform and "When each candidate was immersed in the water the drums beat louder and we laughed an exaggerated laugh which carried a note of scorn. After the ceremony a quarrel developed from an exchange of sharp words which passed between us and the Baptist children" (100). As the vituperations continue, the aggrieved members of the abused church who are aware of the amorous relationship between the Big Father and Lucy say in retaliation, "Your Catholic white man of God sleeps with Lucy" (100).

Big white man of God sleeping with Lucy and the cooks amounts to the the dog eating the bone hung on its neck. The traditional religion frowns at such and the adherents do everything possible to shun evil. Per adventure, when they commit any crime, they atone for it. In Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, Okonkwo atones the indeliberate killing of his kinsman by going on self exile as the tradition prescribes. Similarly, when Tansa goes to Fai's compound, "The Fai was offering a sacrifice on behalf of the family. He stood on a tombstone with the sacrificial cock in his hand. Then he bent down and put the cock's leg under his right foot and the winds under the left and recited the following prayer..." (18)

When a sin is atoned, the victim becomes free again. But the shame the perpetrator of any evil suffers during the atonement is devastating. In order to avert the ignominy associated with the atonement, traditional worshippers strive not to do anything that would warrant that. The new religion preaches that God is not quick in anger and that once one commits a sin and confesses the sins, one is free again. With this in mind, the converts swim in abominations bearing in mind that later they would go to the priest to confess. Jumbam subtly mirrors the fact that traditional religion is not after all, barbaric.

Even the Angel Eats Beans

The white man seen as an infallible messenger of God who has come to sanitize the polluted society is seen doing virtually all those he preaches against. His actions disillusioned the docile black Africans who now see that no mortal is an angel. He preaches respect for elders but he beats old men and old women with impunity. Feliy describes how the Big white Reverend Fr slapped and kicked Afon's father the other day (61). Lukar on the other hand, illustrates how he almost maims his own mother thus, "But my mother, he kicked her with his foot" (62). It is perhaps, the Big Fr's attitudes that makes Pa Matiu, his senior Catechist to dance with double leg. Towards the end of the novel, Big Father is perturbed that the church people had not come to the church, he goes in search of them and sees a terrifying masquerade and having the hunch that it is because of the masquerade that his followers have refused to come to the church, out of anxiety, he pulls the head of the masquerade and is astounded that it is Pa Matiu that is behind the masquerade and he fails and becomes and becomes unconscious.

Jumbam gives a coherent picture of the insensitivity of the white man when he writes,

as Big Father paced up and down the centre of the church and PA Matiu continued to say one prayer after another, Tom's father went to the door, opened it and walked out. Big Father hurried up to him, his shoes stamping hard on the hard floor and his cassock making much noise. Prayers stopped and everybody including PA Matiu turned back to see the drama. Tom's father felt the pursuit obviously but did not turn back now even run. He just moved on. Big Father caught up with him. "Hmm! Bla bla bla. Hm! Hm!" With the keys of the sacristy in his hands he hit Tom's father twice on the head and blood spouted out on to his clothes. Tom's father put his right hand on the spot, felt it and continued going on as before without looking back and moving neither faster not indicating that anything wrong had happened to him. "Bla bla bla. Hm! Hm!" and Big Father kicked Tom's father on the bottom and Tom's father father staggered forward but did not fall (137).

The more pathetic is the fact that the Reverend Fr is salacious to the extent of defiling teenagers. Tansa has been nursing infatuation for Lucy, a co adherent of the white man's religion. At the end of class one day, Lucy is nowhere to be seen by Tansa and he is perturbed. He says, "I gave up. Then turning round to go home I saw something that amazed me. Lucy and Big Father were walking from his house!" When Lucy would not allow Tansa to have sex with her that night as they had earlier planned because it is already later, in disappointment, he says, "Lucy, you won't let me into your Jerusalem but you let in a white man" (97).

CONCLUSION

Jumbam has so aptly presented the fact that God remains the same God and that different societies have peculiar ways they worship God. The audience who goes through the novel will not only appreciate it as a good work of literature that delights but will also understand the crude message of the author about the need to embrace our culture. Laurence Perrine makes it categorical that literature must in addition to the entertainment that it offers also educates. He argues that if a work of art only entertains without educating, it is not worth being read. *The White Man of God* awakens the consciousness of the African man by making it vivid that our own ways of life are not barbaric as the

white man has made us to believe in order that he could rub us of our cherished culture.

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