

THE MYTH AND PSYCHOLOGY OF RELIGION AS SOURCE OF CONFLICT IN DRAMA: AHMED YERIMA'S *HEART OF STONE* AS CASE STUDY

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Abstract

The history of the creation of man from all literatures points to a superior being or godhead that is to be revered, worshipped and venerated. This has overtime created a gap surrounding different religions, especially in their developments over the centuries. The gap in fully understanding each religion has created a myth and dogma around it which often leads to conflict in most developing countries like Nigeria. This paper examined the myth and psychology of religion as a source of conflict in drama, identifying hate speech, intolerance, and misunderstanding of doctrines, among others, as the major sources of conflict. Drama, being a 'harvester' of conflict as a raw material, finds religious conflict a very important focus. The research adopts the content analysis of the qualitative research methodology. The case study, Ahmed Yerima's, Heart of Stone was purposively chosen for critical analysis. The study found in the character of Musa, a clear byproduct of religious bigotry, hypocrisy, manipulation, radicalization and violence in a developing country like Nigeria. The paper, therefore recommends, that steps should be taken to create areas of dialogue among religious adherents, enhancement of tolerance, openness and exchange of knowledge of doctrines, establishment of understanding and goodwill among religious leaders, reduction of poverty, unemployment and above all illiteracy, as very necessary in controlling the psychology of differences in religion, and ensuring peace.

Keywords: Religion, Peace, Conflict, Psychology, Drama

Introduction

Ever since the history of mankind began, man has been practicing different forms of worship and piety. There were no people on the earth unattached to a religion and performing its rites in one-way or another. This is because piety is an instinct, a natural feeling deeply rooted in human being. It can neither be hushed, nor muted in an individual's conscience, nor can the human conscience be prevented from sensing it, or going towards it. Yet, the instincts of piety and worship have not always been guided by soundness and purity; rather they, in most instances, have been deviated expressions and abnormal practices of worship. Religion, in its pure state, is that which is represented by monotheism, the path announced by the prophets and heralded by the apostles, for maintaining the correct mode of worship and to lead the caravan of mankind towards the shores of goodness and peace. So, the history of religious myth, and of devious worship in man's life, finds a variety of expressions. He finds heliolatry, astrolatry, idolatry, zoolatry, worship of monarchs, etc., as forms of worship system available to him.

Analyzing the rise of these deviated religions, and studying the elements, which conspired in developing them, one finds them all connected to a superstitious interpretation of the universe and the afterlife. This in turn discloses the lowness of peoples' knowledge and their ability to fabricate fancy fables that stemmed from their own ignorance and superstition, thereby creating a myth and rites around them. These rites also illustrate the social customs and the imaginative traditions of those peoples, and their stifled mental and moral capabilities.

Declan (17), opines that, "history is full of religions, rituals and superstitious rites. Taken as a whole, they reveal man's ignorance and the lowness of his conscience and feelings in such a way as to cause both astonishment and disgust. Some used to slay their sons in sacrifice to their imagined gods, presenting them as offerings at the altar of a false sacredness. They supplicated and requested the idols grace and the blessings of those stony, silent structures. History tells us of many ignorant nations, peoples and civilizations such as the Babylonians Sumerians, Chaldeans, Egyptians, Greeks, Assyrians, Persians, Romans, and the Arabs (of Jahiliya), who had some sort of worship, religion, and rites which they used to practice, but they were unnatural, superstitious and deviated forms. The Qur'an notes abundantly the dark and tragic side of the lives of

the perished primitive ignorant groups. It draws our attention to the missions of the messengers and prophets, the inviters to true worship and the saviors and reformers of humanity as a whole.

Considering these facts and other historical evidences, we realize that the existence of religion and worship in the course of man's history is clear proof that religion is not a passing phenomenon, nor is it an imaginary compensation for his sufferings from the hardships of his painful life. Neither is it an expression of his failure in understanding the universe and life and in logically and scientifically explaining them; nor is it an opiate for the downtrodden and subjecting them to the injustice of oppressors and exploiters as Marx, the founder of Collapsed Communism, asserted by saying that "Religion is the opium of the people". All these assumptions and biased interpretations, which are being presented by the propagators of materialism and infidelism, with the purpose of falsifying the objectives of religion and destroying the mental and spiritual fundamentals on which it is based, are but futile and refutable allegations which are disproved by objective historical evidence.

The relationship between peace and conflict within the context of religion is clear, for while the dogmatic nature of religion, especially when manipulated negatively, affects the psychology of adherents and none alike, which easily creates conflict. In drama, religion like many others, can cause conflict or create a condition for conflict, from which the ultimate search for peace ensues. Ironically, the contradiction is easy; the assumption that all religion profess peace and as such should be accepted as having little or nothing do to with conflict. John Kennedy said, If we do not stop conflict in our midst, it will stop our civilization (our meaningful existence). Conflict, according to Nwolise (46), is human perpetual affliction because it is a clash of interests between one or two parties.

Conflict could best be described as painful surmountable challenges of life, which seem to threaten the goals, values or needs of any person or persons, which propels people and cause them to be creative and innovative. In addition, conflict is an unavoidable, natural, needed, and normal phenomenon. Violent conflict is conflict that is destructive. Too much conflict is bad, whereas too little conflict is equally not good because it leads to laziness and low productivity. If conflict is normal, needed and expected, is it then right to stop what is normal, necessary and needed? Conflict becomes evil, only when mishandled, which causes it to escalate into violence. If handled properly, conflict can be a positive force for change, modernization, development and growth. Galtung (17), describes conflict metaphorically as the energy that can act as a creator and also act as a destroyer. The truth is that, conflict which acts as destroyer is not desired by humans as people naturally prefer peace. Peace can be understood in two ways. First, there is what we call negative peace which means the absence of physical violence while psychological or indirect violence could still prevail. People subjected to negative peace normally experience it in the form of coercion or invisible violence rather than cooperation. Positive peace is the absence of conflict or social disharmony. It is the absence of social injustice, equal opportunities and environmental harmony.

Peace and conflict produce some dynamic equilibrium that influences individual productivity and development. The equilibrium is reached by conflict and peace pushing against each other in order to produce a balance. At this level, human productivity and capacity is high, but when peace pushes to shift the balance, it produces a condition that may be classed as too peaceful hence, should be noted that conflict does not always suggest destructive. This dynamic relationship between peace and conflict when he says that, "in peace, the potentials exist, while in conflict, the potentials for peace exist. In this dynamic state, peace and conflict coexist, are absorbed by one another and in turn, absorbed by each other" (Galtung 17). Peace and conflict are in harmony with each other, each moving with the other. Cloke and Goldsmith (8), argue that conflict is initiated and at the same time transformed by the individual. As he or she turns the other side of the conflict, peace is ushered in. This paper therefore examines the myth and psychology of conflict which provides a potent 'raw material' for storytelling and creativity, and provides a platform for the search for peace as a solution for a harmonious society with Ahmed Yerima's topical drama, *Heart of Stone*, as case study..

Conceptual Clarification

Religion and Peace

Academic and policy-oriented literature on religion and international affairs is rich in publications arguing that religion is a useful – if not necessary – instrument for achieving peace. More specifically, religious beliefs/values, religious leaders and faith-based organizations are thought to have huge potentials in

promoting peace in any society and/or in the international arena. Scholars in the United States (Johnston and Sampson 205; Johnston 56; Appleby 825; Gopin 25; Smock 2 & Little 3), seem to be leading this school of thought. In fact, 'faith-based' diplomacy was invented in the US (for example the Journal, *The Brandywine Review of Faith & International Affairs*). The US Institute of Peace has developed substantial resources for interfaith projects and publications, and the US government recently created an office for 'Religious Engagement' in the State Department. However, some important works in this vein are emerging in Europe too (Galtung and MacQueen 3). In addition to the academic literature, numerous faith groups and NGOs are also mobilizing and producing policy reports to promote and enhance the contribution by religious actors to development and reconciliation. In Nigeria, there is also the Interfaith Group, which coordinates the activities of faith-based organizations and religious bodies.

The camp of those arguing that the religious dimension needs to be included in conflict resolution work is vast. In *The Ambivalence of the Sacred*, Appleby (830), emphasizes that ethics and ethical convictions, as expressed through religious beliefs, are main drivers for peace. Regardless of which religion may be prevalent, the ethical power of religion can help to unite divided societies. Religion has a role to play, especially as it can facilitate a dialogue about 'virtues' for shaping a better society. However, while acknowledging this and the useful characteristics of faith-based networks and NGOs, he warns against a reductionist approach, in which an instrumentalist perspective of religion and logic of problem-solving prevail while the need to address other issues and involve other actors is downplayed or discounted.

The majority of case studies in textbooks on religion and politics refer to mediation work or interfaith activities promoted by Christian denominations, such as those done in South Africa with Archbishop Desmond Tutu, in Mozambique with Sant'Egidio, in the US with Martin Luther King, and also the courageous work in Nigeria, the Middle East and the Balkans, of various priests (Smock 3). On the Christian heritage of non-violence and peace building, he argues that Christian teaching and values provide the foundations for 'Christian peacemaking', i.e., Christianity provides a whole set of non-violent responses to conflicts worldwide, both within and between societies.

The work of Lederach (22), is often regarded as landmark research in demonstrating the pioneer role played by Mennonite communities in the history of their non-violent contributions to peacemaking. In addition, Quakers and Jehovah's Witnesses, two groups that are part of the Christian family, have also made explicit their pacifist stance and rejection of violence, on the other hand, provides a thought-provoking and profound analysis of Christian justifications for the morality, and even the necessity of war. This is based on a thorough review of the long tradition of the Just War Theory (JWT) in Christian thinking, combined with modern insights into international relations and the realities of war. By doing so, he aligns himself with the great Christian philosophers behind the JWT, and adapts it to the modern world. Lederach argues that war can sometimes be a necessity and that therefore, the Christian just war theory ultimately helps to end conflict and promote peace.

Muslim scholar Abu-Nimer (15), argues that Islam is based on fundamental human values encoded in the Qur'an, related religious writings and the Islamic tradition. Based on those values, Muslim societies have developed a considerable set of non-violent tools for conflict resolution and peace building experiences. Traditional Arab-Muslim mechanisms for dispute resolution include third-party mediation and arbitration in any form of social conflict. Such mechanisms also included traditional reconciliation methods, based on the value of forgiveness and public repentance.

Galtung and MacQueen (10), analyze in details, the contribution to peacemaking by Asian religions such as Buddhism or Taoism, with reference to Galtung's general theory. Starting from and underlining the central role of achieving inner peace, he emphasizes that Buddhism has a strong track record of providing peaceful answers to social and political violence, in particular through its worldwide grassroots work, and points to the responsibility that Buddhists have for promoting peace. However, others critique Buddhism for being too much of an individualistic tradition that does not really stress the importance of being at peace with the others, and note that it has missed opportunities to achieve peaceful solutions, in Sri Lanka and Tibet for example.

Faith-based mediation is seen as an important contributor to conflict resolution and peace. However, no work sees this as a complete substitute to traditional diplomatic avenues. The pioneering work of Johnston and Sampson (2007), brought together scholars emphasizing the comparative advantage of religious actors. Basing their findings on case studies from East Germany, Philippines, South Africa and Zimbabwe, they argued that individuals that based their work on either religious or spiritual thinking were in a better place to reach out to regional and local actors than were politicians that did not. Similarly, Cox, et al (17), argue that religion can be well suited for resolving particularly prolonged, stalemated or intractable conflicts. The key characteristics associated with (typically local) religious leaders that enable them to help in situations of conflict, include authority, trust, professionalism and also cultural and practical/experiential closeness to the people involved (Lederach 23; Smock 5).

On a pragmatic level, especially when conflict resolution and peacekeeping are proceeding in collaboration with development programmes, religious organizations and leaders have also proven particularly effective in delivering aid and effective development projects. This is because faith communities, in addition to being trusted, are inexpensive and they work rapidly, relying on wide networks of volunteers that are fervently devoted to the cause and ready to put their lives on the line. This has proven to be more effective than the work of the salaried staff of large and bureaucratic international organizations and secular NGOs (Barnett and Stein 202).

Religious movements and leaders may also promote the setting of national and international norms on peace, and generally contribute to worldwide peace by changing the international discourse on religion and peace. The historic contribution by Martin Luther King to the spread of non-violent resistance and international and national anti-discrimination laws is a prominent example for peace-generating dynamics, discussed extensively in the scholarly literature.

The confidence and trust that religion-based actors inspire in the parties to the conflict depend on these three characteristics, building confidence in their professional and conflict-specific qualifications, in their ethical and moral qualifications, and also in their emotional qualifications. Weingardt (44) further argues that all actors that want to promote peace should ideally have these characteristics, but he also contends that 'religion-based' actors have a comparative advantage: they often have a credit of trust.

There are three main reasons for this credit of trust. First is that reference to religious thinking can be used in all cultures as a means to justify, in a comprehensible and legitimate way, peaceful and non-violent conflict resolution. Secondly, conflict parties often see 'religion-based' actors as able and willing to consider not just obvious facts, but also underlying and profound dimensions of conflict resolution, such as morality, responsibility, reconciliation, and forgiveness. Lastly, 'religion based' actors, in contrast to secular actors, are often perceived to be driven less by self-interest than by considerations of general interest of all.

Conflict

The word conflict is derived from a Latin word “configure”, which means to strike together (Albert 187). Historically, attempts by scholars to conceptualize conflict have “been conflictual.” One of the most quoted traditional definitions regards conflict as “... a struggle over value and claims to scarce, status, power and resources in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralize, injure or eliminate their rivals”(Onigu Otite 11). Conflict is inherent in all societies and arises when two or more groups believe their interests are incompatible. Conflict simply means a state of disagreement, controversy or opposition. Conflict is a behaviour by a person or group that inhibits the attainment of goals by another person or group. Uchendu (6), sees conflict as a struggle, a clash between contradictory wishes, to be incompatible, to oppose. That is, it is opposing interests that occur in relationship.

In the view of Wolff (47), conflict is used to describe “a situation in which two or more actors pursue incompatible, yet from their individual perspectives entirely just goals”. He further argues that sometimes, conflict is as a result of the struggle for power and material gain by leaders and followers alike. Because of such vested interests, the conflict entrepreneurs prefer conflict to cooperation and privilege violence over negotiations.

Conflict may also be defined as a struggle or contest between people with opposing needs, ideas, beliefs, values or goals. Conflict might escalate and lead to unproductive results, or conflict can be beneficially resolved and lead to quality final products. Conflict, according to Best (3), is an intrinsic and inevitable part of human existence. However, violent conflict is not inevitable and as such is an anomaly. Best, states that conflict is: "...the pursuit of incompatible interests and goals by different groups...armed conflict is the resort to the use of force and armed violence in the pursuit of incompatible interests and goals". The emphasis is on the divergence of interests and aspirations of the parties. Mial, et al (2005), define conflict as the pursuit of incompatible goals by different groups. The definition here applies to any conflict, whether executed by the use of force or by peaceful means. Kriesberg (6), argues that "a conflict emerges when members of one or more potential conflict parties develop a shared identity, generate a sense of grievance, from a goal that another party, being responsible to believe that they can bring about that change" Pruitt and Rubin (10), refer to conflict as an occurrence due to perceived divergence of interest or believe that the parties current aspirations cannot be achieved simultaneously.

Conflict in Drama

Conflict is one the basic elements and foundation of dramatic creativity. It is a literary device that presents the struggle between two sides due to a disagreement in values, desires, aspirations. This is reflected in disagreements between a character and self; against another character; against society; against nature; against supernaturals; against technology, etc. Conflict in drama is the driving force of a story, and it is what allows a plot to move from one point to another. Conflict builds narrative tension, portrays complex concepts that are interlaced into a story, and presents a deeper look into a character's motivations, feelings, weaknesses and values.

The Myth and Psychology of Religion, Peace and Conflict

Myth is a traditional story which embodies a belief regarding some fact and phenomenon of experience, and in which often, the forces of nature and of the soul are personified. It is a sacred narrative regarding a god, a hero, the origin of the world, or of a people. Myth is also a commonly held but false belief, a common misconception, a fictitious or imaginary person or thing, a popular conception about a real person or event which exaggerates or idealizes reality. A myth presents a person or thing held in excessive quasi-religious awe or admiration based on popular legend. It is a person or thing existing 'only in the imagination', or whose actual existence is not verifiable.

Conflict and peace often have a religious dimension, conflict may occur between adherents of different faith traditions or rivals within a faith tradition. Religion may play a role as a marker of identity, a mobilizing device, a basis for rationalizing violent behaviour or a source of values on which to base peace actions, peace-building and reconciliation.

The myth in religion which causes conflict is the dogmatic nature of religion. A dogma is an authoritative principle, belief or statement of opinion, especially one considered to be absolutely true and indisputable, regardless of evidence or without evidence to support it. A dogma is a doctrine (or set of doctrines), relating to matters such as morality and faith, set forth authoritatively by religious faith, organizations or leaders.

The relationships between religious and other key actors, especially in the state, are complex. Religious leaders may play important roles in instigating or preventing conflict and engendering peace, and in either sustaining bad feeling or attempting to prevent a re-occurrence. With distorted dogmas, various organizational forms associated with religious traditions may provide a basis for mobilization, give humanitarian assistance during a conflict emergency, assist longer term recovery and build peaceful (or confrontational) relationships in the longer term.

Causes of Religious Conflicts

The causes of religious conflict vary from society to society, depending in the main, the religious heterogeneity, civilization and social advancement. For whereas less advanced and less developed societies are wont to hold strongly to divisive religious issues, advanced societies pay less attention to religious divisions. This is because the underlying propelling factors of religious sympathies like poverty, unemployment and illiteracy, are less or almost non-existent. However, wherever religious conflict is prevalent, the following are usually the main causes, among others.

Hate Speech

This refers to all activities amounting to the advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence. In Nigeria for instance, Plateau state Christian and Muslims at a point were involved in insulting or inciting contempt of religious creed, desecrating of places of worship, knowing that is an insult on that religion to do so, voluntarily causing of disturbance to any religious assembly and trespass on a place of worship or burial, with intention to hurt the feelings of any person or of insulting the religion of any person.

Crippling of Relationship

It is evident that Christians and Muslims in Nigeria have been involved in hostilities which to a large extent have crippled their relationship. In Plateau state for example, in the past, most especially during festivals, both Christians and Muslims come together to celebrate, but because of the conflict in the state, such relationship is no longer experienced or not in existence. This has shown the world the gap that exist between them despite their common roots.

Segregated Religious Settlement Pattern

One of the gaps that exist between religion and peace is seen in the pattern of settlements. Plateau State is an example of such divides, as the state is partitioned in such a way that Christians are found in places like Gada Biu, Alheri, Rukuba Road, Jenta, Angwan Rogo, and the likes, while the Muslims are found in areas like Angwan Rogo, Bauchi Road, Nasarawa, and the likes. For a long time, mainstream publications on conflict and peace studies, as well as those on international relations, tended to ignore the subject of 'religion'. However, prolific literature that addresses the *relationship* between religion, peace, conflict and diplomacy began to emerge during the 1990s. Much of it was contradictory, often written from a religious perspective by individuals with a religious background. But much of it was also inspired by Universalist thinking, analyzing the bridges built by religions across societies and throughout history, without neglecting the divisive power of religious discourse.

Ahmed Yerima's *Heart of Stone*: A Case Study

A playwright, like other creative writers, does not create from a vacuum. He, as a member of the society and his immediate environment, is influenced by issues, events and situations which affect people around him. He therefore selects from social, economic, religious, cultural and other issues around him. He has an advantaged position of being a mouthpiece, a voice and opinion moulder and leader of his society.

Ahmed Parker Yerima, is a Nigerian playwright whose plays and other literary works capture the totality of the Nigerian society; from his plays like *Otaelo*, *Akuabata*, *Iyase*, *Attahiru*, *Aetu*, *Heart of Stone*, among many others, his role in addressing fundamental issues of religion, culture, leadership, gender, etc., are unmistakable. However, his *Heart of Stone* stands out as his major play which addresses the issue of religious conflict, which is the focus of this paper. A brief discourse of his thematic thrust will further explain the myth and psychology of religion which many times breeds violent conflict.

Heart of Stone: Play Summary

Ahmed Yerima's *Heart of Stone* (2018), is a play that captures the current Nigerian story of violence, and terrorism, with foundation on religious intolerance and hypocrisy which for almost two decade, held Nigerians and Nigeria hostage, especially in the North Eastern part of the country. In the play, Musa runs from death but not far enough from its canny sting. His 'heart of stone' is so cold that his suicide mission radar stringently points at a large gathering of his family and friends in a Church wedding. Luckily, Kaka Patu, his grandmother and Amina his fiancée are unavoidably absent, but Kaka Vero and Gladys are unlucky. Musa is apprehended and his death becomes inevitable, either subtle or hard.

Ahmed Yerima overtly brings this ugly Nigerian social reality to stage in *Heart of Stone* to unveil the depth of man's heart of darkness and the visceral vicissitudes of scripture misinterpretation and misappropriation by those whose status should ordinarily make them catalyst to peace. Using the characters of Sheik Sani and his protégé Musa, Yerima opens up the dangers of religious manipulations which has over the years aggravated violence and terrorism from fanatics. The play's main subject matter can be appreciated against the background that Ahmed Yerima is a Moslem, but has a Christian name 'Parker'. He attended Christian schools and is married to a Christian. This has allowed him to write from an informed and vantage position of one who knows to a large extent, the doctrines and practice of the two religions he presented in the story.

Ahmed Yerima's *Heart of Stone* explores his angst against insurgency and its causes in Nigeria; highlighting religious intolerance and hate, as well as poverty, as strong reasons for the trend, and reveals that, religious clerics sometimes abuse their place of authority by instigating and influencing innocent followers to commit violent acts of terror. He also found present high level of poverty as a strong force in influencing young people to seek better livelihood, thereby becoming vulnerable to easy recruitment as terrorists.

Aspects of Yerima's thematic focus which clearly capture the focus of this paper, are briefly discussed.

i. Religious Intolerance

The play delves into the theme of religious intolerance, by shedding light on its destructive consequences, especially, the divisive impact it has on the psychology of the Nigerian people. Religion, being a highly delicate sensitive issue, the play explores the deep-seated animosity and prejudice that arises between different religious groups, most especially, Christianity and Islam. In the story, Musa's intense hatred for Christians reflects the religious tensions that exists in Nigerian. He believes that Christians insult Muslims through their songs and mode of worship, understanding such expressions as deliberate affronts to the Islamic faith. His anger and resentment are further fueled by his interpretation of Christian practices as derogatory and disrespectful. This is clearly seen in Musa's discussion with his Cousin Amina, after a Church activity which he attended with them:

AMINA: Musa, why? Why did you leave that way? You got everybody worried.

MUSA: You heard the Pastor, didn't you?

AMINA: I did. But what did he say? It was a prayer, Musa. What is happening to you? Why?

MUSA: You heard the song? Didn't you?

AMINA: Yes, and what about it?

MUSA: Who do you think is the Satan who fell into the smelly gutter of well?

AMINA: No one, just Satan. Musa, it is a song

MUSA: A song, eh? Satan don fall for gutter, march am, march am. That's me. That's us. The song is saying that all Muslims are siblings of Satan, who should be trampled upon. We? Who did we ever hurt? I mean who are the peace-loving cursed docile illiterates? Us! ...

AMINA: Us?

MUSA: Yes ... Us Muslims. All their songs ... All their prayers insult us. They brand us as the children of the most evil spirit, the devil. Shetani! They want hell fire to burn us to smithereens, And yet they want us to be the one. To be friends. They say we worship the same God. How can I swear I will not go for the wedding if this is the kind of songs they will sing at the wedding. Even their prayers are so militant, aimed at us described as blind 'gambari', beggars' children of the devil (pp 38-39).

Musa's character is Yerima's example to demonstrate the dangerous repercussions of religious intolerance. As Musa erroneously believes in the dehumanizing portrayal of Muslims in Christian songs and prayers, this pushes him towards radicalization and violence. His views reflect a distorted understanding of religious differences, and a willingness to perpetrate violence against those who hold different beliefs, or of different faith.

ii. Poverty and Religious Hypocrisy

Poverty is a major state of easy manipulation, albeit negatively. This is because the economic status of a people easily affects their consciousness. Where the poverty level is high, in addition to unemployment and illiteracy, religious manipulations find a fertile ground for operation. In *Heart of Stone*, Musa is from a poor background. He is a menial Well Digger, whose daily survival is through his physical strength, so naturally he became a willing tool in the hands of both religious hypocrites represented by Sheik Sani and Insurgents/terrorists. His bitterness began early in life when he was denied the opportunity of better education by the manipulation of his teacher and mentor, Sheik Sani, who came to visit him in prison before he committed suicide before his execution.

SANI: What happened to you? What happened to the best boy in my Koranic school?

MUSA: He grew up. And as he grew, so did his perception about life. He started to see and feel things differently. He no longer believed those little stories about right and wrong, and how Allah lived in Heaven. And how piety guaranteed us a ticket to paradise. He became amazed at the capacity of man to be evil, and wondered if God indeed lived with us on earth any more. He grew up, Mallam, seeing the dark hearts of men ...

SANI: You are angry

MUSA: I am, Mallam. I should be! I must be

SANI: Why?

MUSA: I stand before you a used fool for dredging water from the earth. A dreg of my grandmother's *burukutu*. A spent spirit, uncared for even by faith itself, and a living carcass ready to meet his maker.

SANI: I sense bitterness, a deep seething melancholy in your words. May Allah ...

MUSA: Kai, *Rankaidede*. Don't say one more word. It is better for me to die with you as my Koranic school teacher in my head, rather than see pretensions stand before me. You see why we kill even our own?

SANI: What?

MUSA: Why even those who call themselves spiritual fathers, leaders of the *ja ma'a*, those who wrapped their heads with well-shaped *Rawani*, with well-manicured fingers and beard, and know the Holy Qur'an by heart, you see why we do not spare them in the judgement of death?

SANI: No

MUSA: Because it is better to be truthful with God. Hypocrites all!
Dukaku! (pp 54-56).

When such hypocrisy is weighed against the status of Musa, the result is usually very clear: bitterness, betrayal of trust and disappointment. These mindsets radicalize the individual into becoming a social deviant, for which the society suffers at the long run, as Musa exemplifies.

iii. Radicalization and Terrorism

In Ahmed Yerima's *Heart of Stone*, it is clear that the byproduct of religious intolerance, poverty and manipulation, is radicalization, violence and terrorism. This we see in the character of Musa by his bitter and anger, in addition to wrong religious indoctrination and hypocrisy. We see this fact clearly his conversation with his aunt, Kaka Vero:

- VERO:** ...When Gladys came home one rainy night crying, saying that you had broken off your engagement to her because she was your sister, I knew the reason was that you had become the pure believer and suddenly we had become filthy kaffirs to you.
- MUSA:** Yes, Kaka
- VERO:** ... When you became a teacher in a Koranic school, and suddenly we became dirty pigs ... unbelievers in your sight. From that day I saw you as a little boy join a group of Almajiri to force a car driver to a stop and with your mouths you drew fuel from his car after beating him up for refusing to recite the Fathia; and as I watched, it first appeared like play to me, but in a frenzy of madness, you all ran towards our Church, poured the petrol under the doors while the other wild boys broke the Church windows and threw in burning rags into it ... our eyes met, in one flash, I saw those red beady eyes of stones
- MUSA:** I am sorry. It was what we were told to do. The Ustaz had said Allah had decreed it. We were used.
- VERO:** When my maternal cousin's house, Bitrus house was burnt in Koghum village in Wang District of Jos, with all five members of his family burnt alive, again, it was another trip of madness. Millions have died after.
- MUSA:** I am sorry
- VERO:** The very words the political and religious leaders said ... We have never spoken about it until tonight. But I always know that there was some seething anger burning in you in your quietness. Your deceitful gentle nods. And what happened tonight ...
- MUSA:** Tonight? Yes, speak, Mother
- VERO:** Confirmed my fears. As I watched you stare at us with those same eyes that saved me in the Church hidden by the frightening beard, and the redness of your eyes, and as you looked at the Pastor as he prayed, I knew that the playful madness was back again.
(pp 41-42).

In the play, Musa's case is a result of the exploitation and manipulation of innocent minds through deceitful religious teaching by bigots who masquerade as religious leaders. The Almajiri (Islamic religious pupils) are denied formal education, leaving them vulnerable for manipulation. They are hardly allowed to own their own Quran. The Quran and knowledge of it, is their teacher, the Mallam. They grow up like Musa, a semi-illiterates, which hinders their ability to interpret and understand complex ideas, denies them critical thinking skills and consciousness to question false teachings.

Ahmed Yerima's conclusion in the play is that the disrespect to life occasioned by religious violence and insurgency places a demand on artists and writers to arouse social conscience in the search for peaceful existence within the realities of our new modernity.

Conclusion

Conflict within the context of religion is most likely to lead to violence. The myth and psychology in religious issues easily creates a binary due to its dogmatic nature. And with the nature of man as a 'religious being', we may not totally easily eradicate such violence in the society. However, there is need to avoid all conditions that breed fundamentalism and violence, e.g. hate speech, hypocrisy, blasphemy, and intolerance. Steps should be taken to create areas of dialogue among religious adherents. This means that there should be varieties of situations in which adherents of religion live, talk and work together irrespective of religious backgrounds.

Method of doing this could involve exchange of goodwill messages during religious feasts and celebrating religious festivals and ceremonies together irrespective of sect, denomination or camp to promote unity in diversity. There should also be an enhancement of tolerance, one of the often-quoted attributes of all religion. This is because all religions speak of our common humanity, common origin of human kind, concept of divine justice and humane order for all. This is the starting point for building a bridge for mutual understanding across religions as this will promote religious harmony.

Information exchange among religions should be used to demystify and refocus the psychology of adherents and none alike. Exchange of important information among various religions, most especially, about the entire good of the entire community, will also be useful in creating understanding and appreciating differences. This will also further increase mutual trust and widen areas of credibility among various religions, and thereby reduce religious conflicts, and close the gap between conflict and peace in the society.

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