

## Anglo-Arabic Influence and the African Sacred: Implications for Conflicts and Conflict Resolution in Africa

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### ABSTRACT

*The sacred has always been a unifying force in the history of the theatre especially during classical and medieval periods. Within the African region, the sacred was also a stabilising force in the traditional societies and their theatres before modern and contemporary African societies witnessed the bastardization and destruction of the African sacred by Anglo-Arabic cultures. The problem of this study therefore, is religious conflict generated by erosion of the African sacred by Anglo-Arabic cultures. The paper therefore, aims at finding solution to religious absolutism in Africa; with the objectives of ridding Africa of numerous religious based conflicts through restoration of the sacredness of the African sacred. The study questioned imposition of foreign religions and their threats to peaceful co-existence in the face of the facetious religions of the Anglo-Arabic worlds that cause vilification of one another and the use of force as a sacred arm of evangelism. Consequently, the researcher examined the impact of Anglo-Arabic cultures in Kalu Uka's Ikhamma and Femi Osofisan's Once Upon Four Robbers selected as paradigms. Case study and content analysis approaches of the qualitative research method were adopted for data collection and analysis. The study concluded that Anglo-Arabic cultures despite their advantages destroyed the African sacred and consequently led to religious based conflicts in Africa. Therefore the study recommends clear understanding of these issues for peaceful resolution of religious based conflicts in Africa.*

**Keywords:** *Anglo-Arabic, Conflict, Africa, Influence, Religion, Resolution, Sacred*

### INTRODUCTION

Africa is a race known for deep religious orientation and worship; for most Africans, all natural phenomena and social events have religious connotations; this explains the reluctance in complete relinquishing of African traditional religion despite the level of fanaticism among Christian and Moslem faithful in Africa. Hence, the Africanist faith in traditional religion; offers explanations for phenomena in ways congruent with age-long beliefs and atavistic views of African communities. The British understanding of the importance of religion in the lives of Africans made them dynamite the great Long Juju of Arochukwu (Ibina Ukpabi shrine at Arochukwu, Abia State Nigeria), which at the time in question was the crux of Igbo traditional religious belief. Asiegbu posits that the destruction of the shrine, Long Juju of Arochukwu and its worship by the colonist depicts the highhandedness of colonialism which Achebe captures in Things Fall Apart. According to him,

In the November Memorandum of Instructions of 1901, the Colonial Government outlined five apparent reasons for its actions, but only one revealed its true intention regarding the Arochukwu Oracle: to abolish the juju hierarchy of the Aro tribe...which is opposed to the establishment of the colonial Government (26).

Thus, the destruction of the sacred Arochukwu oracle between 1901 and 1902 reveals the kind of wanton destructions that characterized colonialism and its allies. The same fate also befell many traditions, customs and native religions of colonised and Islamized Africa. The Fulani nomad, Shehu Usman dan Fodio, relied on the importance of religion to Africans and decided to convert the peoples of Northern Nigeria willy-nilly in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century (1908-1810) to the Moslem religion. Attack and wanton destruction of the sacred in Africa by colonialism and agents of Anglo-Arabic cultures was a major strategy adopted by the West and the Arabs to Westernize and Islamize Africa. Christianity which in itself is an essential arm of Westernism combined with Islam as a macrocosm of Arabic culture to provide the

platform for attacks on the African sacred through Westernization and Islamization crusades. Even the non religious agents of colonialism and imperialism also made the African sacred their targets in their so called civilization and indoctrination ventures. Though Islam differs from Christianity, it is still a foreign religion and Islamization of Africa reflects the same wanton attacks on the African sacred by evangelization. According to Sani Ashiru; “Before the advent of Islam in Hausaland, some of the local spirits influenced the world outlook of the people” (82). For instance the festivals of dances during which tricks and magic are displayed has been known in Hausaland from time immemorial. Just as you find villages of wrestlers and boxers, so do you find villages of “the dancing magicians.” (Ibrahim Madawi, Yahaya Isa and Bello Daura, 75). Apart from the festivals and the dancing magicians, the Hausa sacred was also seen in the worship of the rocks. Sani Ashiru affirms that;

The “Duwatsun Kasar Hausa”, the rocks were associated with pre-Islamic religious beliefs. The rocks like those in Kwatarkwashi, all over the Kasar Hausa (Hausa land) became centre for the worship of the *iskoki* (spirit). For example, in Kano and Zazzau were found *Dala*, *Gwauron Dutse*, *Kuffena*, *Madakarci* and *Turunku*. The worship of *Magiro* (*Bagiro*) in Kasar Katsina developed out of the worship of the spirit of the ancestors (82).

Unfortunately Islamization presented these indigenous religious practices as animist religion, presented Africans as ungodly and brutally destroyed everything that was seen as the sacred. According to Sani Ashiru; “Generally speaking the introduction of Islam has dramatically changed the cosmological outlook of people of Hausaland. The worship of spirit and other traditional beliefs; were no longer in practice in most of the states of Hausaland” (82).

Today, Christianity and Islam have triumphed over the pristine African religions, relegating them to the background through colonialism and Jihad that propagated Anglo-Arabic culture and aggressive instigation of Africans against one another and their own religions. The colonist achieved this feat partly because of his divide and rule policy, sabotage by Africans against their own and mainly because the traditional Africans were not organised on religious fronts to effectively defend what they believed in

against foreign encroachments (in fact, they left the stage open for both foreigners and indigenes to worship their God and gods respectively, the way they wished). The success of Islam and Christianity in destroying the African sacred also stems from the fact that the two religions rank high among the organised religions of the world, and are, in truth, the largest denominations. These organisations epitomise strict dogmatism and indoctrination of their converts and seem to have no place for the members of other denominations. (Matthew 10:10; Sura 9, 5; Sura 2: 120). They are absolutists who believe that God revealed Himself to them and to them alone God revealed Himself. Hence, Christians and Moslems presume that out of their love for God and hatred for their acclaimed infidel neighbours, whose souls would suffer perdition in Hades; they will see God in His glory after life on earth. Some of these believers go to the extreme of taking up arms for the annihilation of the so called unbelievers in furtherance of their faith and are happy to die as martyrs if it comes to worst (Sura 4: 74). Others engage in aggressive evangelism, forcibly proselytising and converting adherents of the traditional religion and those whose religious affiliations go contrary to their own.

Given the fact that evangelization is part and parcel of most religions, one wonders why African traditional religions are passive or docile on the issue of evangelization and have been on the receiving end concerning the type of fanaticism that characterize foreign religions in Africa. The extremity of foreign religions have cost Africa so much in human and material resources and have constituted enormous threat to the African sacred as well as peace and security in Africa. Many governments of African countries are forced to divert money and manpower meant for developmental projects into fighting insurgences and management of religious crises. Ifesinachi Ken, quoting G.M. Lyons says that; “The serious casualties incurred from traditional peace keeping in dangerous domestic conflicts and the rising financial burden were critical questions posing a challenge to statesmen the world over ...” (72).

The consequences of imposition of monotheism on the world by Anglo-Arabic forces are not only incredible but should wake Africans from slumber. God in his wisdom created all peoples and endowed them with myths, rituals and faiths that sustain their religions. Hence, from pre-

historic times to the modern and postmodern eras; religion is conceptualised in the sacredness and sanctity of the sacred and Africa is not left out. The sacredness of some objects and personages, like God, gods, prophets, deities, spirits, ghosts and priests remain a constant in the *modus operandi* of religion in the three major regions of the world. Thus, this trend has produced intermittently, positivities and negativities that condition human activities within the peculiarity of each geo-enclave. Thus, the destruction of the other's sacred by another; shall, rather than foster peace continually, which is what all religions profess, lead to the opposite (conflicts).

Despite the ethical and humanistic potentials of emergent monotheisms in Africa; religion has globally played negative roles at various times and in different regions of the world especially as an extension of colonialism and imperialism to Africa. This trend sometimes questions faiths that are inborn in humans and communities in their quest for God, gods, peace and love of God and mankind. Hence, religious fanaticism amounts to abuse of God's gift of faith and religion especially, if, in our attempt to prove ourselves worthy of Him, we trample upon our fellow men, maim, destroy and kill.

Religious violence, totalitarianism and fanaticism appear to be traits of foreign religions than African religions given the peaceful nature of African religions. Then, one wonders why Africans should opt for the violent but foreign religion that stifled the development of indigenous religions through war and conquest. When juxtaposed with African traditional religions; Anglo-Arabic religions appear to have developed with violence, conflicts and intolerance. It is also a truism that the negativities of foreign religions have heightened with the sophistication of the society. Even the scriptures recorded religious violence as manifest in the murder of Abel by Cain. This first shedding of human blood is motivated by worship and religious belief- God's acceptance of Abel's harvest thanksgiving and rejection of Cain's (Gen. 4: 3-8). In Genesis chapter five, God engulfed Noah's world in a flood because of sin, immorality and general lack of faith in God that characterized Noah's world. The drowning of the Egyptians in the Red Sea by Moses in Exodus 14: 27-28, despite its political motivation, of the annexation of Canaan by Israel and the dislocation of the inhabitants in the Book of Joshua; it had in it, a religious drive

to prove the conquering power of the Jewish Jehovah God. Elijah massacred the four hundred prophets of Baal because they worshipped another god whom Elijah does not approve (1 Kings 18: 40). David looked at Goliath and called him an uncircumcised Philistine, by which he meant an unclean thing, an unbeliever (1 Sam 17:51). This means that David vanquished Goliath because of the latter's sin of unbelief in the ascendancy of the God of the Israelites. The Israeli and Palestine border feud has its roots in religious differences. In fact, it was because of this same feud that David slew Goliath! Since then till today, the world including Nigeria, has never known peace because of religious differences

The formidable Emperor Nero of Rome, in an attempt to protect his reign and the religious traditions of the empire in A.D. 64 unleashed fire on the early church; pushed to the wall, the oppressed church which had to fight back, hence the evolution of the knighthood. It was out of religious fervency that the peasants took up arms in Germany in what became known then as Peasant War in 1524-25 (Bainton, 210). The peasants grew to hate the traditional Catholic ideas because of the revolutionary theologies of Martin Luther. Following Luther's example, King Henry VII of England broke away from the Universal Church; methodically and forcefully he cleansed England of Papal influence (Greene, 304). Later, the Puritan Cromwell had to mobilise his soldiers on the grounds of faith. According to Walter Rodgeny, in his book, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, European conquest of America, Asia and Africa was partly seen as a victory for the church!

Similarly, the Moslems believe that Prophet Muhammad received divine mandate to convert all mankind if need be with brutal force and arms, if words failed. (Moshay,64). The Qu'ran, captures this view clearly where it says:

O ye who believe! Take not the Jews and the Christians as friends. They are but friends to one another. And he amongst you who takes them then surely he is one of them. Verily, Allah guides not the unjust people (Sura 2: 120).

The above is a divine command, as seen and understood by the followers of the Medina, Prophet- Muhammad to disassociate themselves from non Muslims and destroy same if need be. Thus, his exploits from Medina to Mecca; from Constantinople to Egypt; from North to West

Africa, the Muslim dogma of religious conquest has won Muhammad global venerations! Motivated by this religious conquest and domination, the Fulanis that traded in what is now Northern Nigeria, in eighteen hundred and eight (1808) rose up and revolted against the local Hausa kingdoms, destroying the African sacred in these conquests. By 1810, the Hausas had been conquered and forcibly converted to Islam. Destruction of the African sacred is evident in both evangelization and islamization of Africa.

For instance, the Christian missionaries found that the Igbo were contented with their own mode of worship, in it they felt safe. This was not in the best interest of the imperialist/missionary officials of Britain. Therefore, they sought and discovered the secret of this religious big-headedness— The Long Juju of Arochukwu— Ibina Ukpabi- which they destroyed in 1934 (Ukaegbu, 85). This act is typical of the Christian missionaries because their Bible is of the view that “All the gods of the nations are idols” (1 Chronicles 16: 26).

According to Madiebo, part of the means used to prepare the minds of the Hausa Muslims in 1966 against the southerners who were mostly Christians, was a daily running of “serialised articles on the Islamic war of conquest or Jihad” in a government newspaper (Madiebo, 35). When the riots or Jihad began, it was so grievous and catastrophic that Achebe quoted a certain Sierra Leonean living in Northern Nigeria at the time who wrote home to his people saying “The killing of the Igbo has become a state industry in Nigeria,” (Achebe, 82) hence any non Igbo speaking state organizes the killing of the Igbo at will.

### **WESTERNISM, ISLAMIZATION AND RELIGIOUS CONFLICTS IN NIGERIA**

Contemporaneity of religions implies different religions existing side by side in the same period of time; it simply means co-existence of different religions. Contemporaneity has advantages; and disadvantages; foremost among its advantages is that, it creates avenue for people to look at the world differently, thereby complementing one another’s shortcomings when and where they occur: where one is conservative, another might be progressive, and this ultimately engenders development. To many people in Africa, it is a plausible argument that Christianity single-handedly turned the continent around. This is so because the

Western religion introduced new ways of looking at our lives: religiously, socially and even politically. Elsewhere, the argument is still plausible. The Gothic cathedrals of Europe were off springs of the Church; the monasteries all through the Middle Ages served as the safe havens for scholarly works and many of the monks that inhabited the monasteries were, without question great thinkers. Hence, the monasteries were often left alone whenever a city was attacked by enemy soldiers and was not destroyed or looted. The influence of Constantinople, both in learning and commerce were immense in Europe, as reported by Oscar Brocket. It was partly because of this that many Christian monarchs in Europe, including the Hapsburg Emperor Charles V, fought continually to wrench the city away from Islam.

However, contemporaneity has had great negative impact in world history, as has already been said earlier in this write-up. It has fanned the embers of fanaticism, it has engendered political, economic and social upheavals; the place of unity and cohesion in the family is quickly fading away due to the impact of contemporaneity. Indeed, many Christians today detest their family members who are still animists, especially among the Igbo. Some Pentecostal denomination think that the orthodox churches are unbelievers, and whenever possible, they are stigmatised by the Protestants. Thousands of lives have been lost in religious-based riots in Nigeria since 1960. Properties worth billions of Naira equally have been lost due to religious intolerance of the Nigerian peoples. Presently, the country is facing one of her most trial national crises in the hands of the organised Islamic sect called Boko Haram. The magnitude of this insurgency, the cost in humans and in property, the revenue expended in the management of the insurrection since it started in the country is second only to the Nigerian civil war experience of 1967-1970. Mali had to call for external aid to flush out the activities of extremists; in Egypt the ISIS group is presently making their demands on the government of civil populations of that country. In Somalia, the story is even uglier.

Government attention is diverted to where it should not be; while the African continent is held to ransom by foreign religions. It appears that the continent has no solution to religious indoctrination of her people and consequent fanaticism spreading like bush fire in Africa. The threat of religious sectarianism and

fundamentalism is becoming worrisome, and indeed casts a doubt on the enthronement of lasting peace in Africa. African has recorded minimal violence from the adherents of her traditional religions; hence, there is no doubt that these groups are the consequences of Anglo-Arabic influence in Africa. Modern African dramatists started early to capture the impacts and consequences of Anglo-Arabic culture in their plays. Ngugi wa Thiong'o in his *Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, Nwabueze in *When the Arrow Rebounds*, Yerima in *Aietu*, Tsegaye Gabre Medihn in *Oda Oak Oracle*, Felix Egwuda-Ugbeda in *The Whirlwind* including Kalu Uka's *Ikhamma* and Femi Osofisan's *Once Upon Four Robbers* which the researchers selected for study. The impacts of westernism, evangelization and islamization are made obvious in these plays and therefore justify them as variables of peace building process and conflict resolution in Nigeria.

### **THE AFRICAN SACRED, ANGLO-ARABIC INFLUENCE AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN AFRICA: UKA'S IKHAMMA AND OSOFISAN'S ONCE UPON FOUR ROBBERS**

Kalu Uka uses a diasporian character to portray the theme of desecration of the African sacred in the play *Ikhamma*, which is a mythic-ritual adaptation of the myth and ritual of sanctification of space of the Ohafia fishing festival in Imo State of Nigeria from where Uka hails. Uka started his tertiary education at the University College Ibadan, Nigeria, and proceeded to Toronto, Canada for postgraduate studies. He taught at various Universities in England, the United States of America and Nigeria. He has written many plays, including an adaptation of Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God* into the play, *A Harvest of Ants*. *Ikhamma*, his most popular play, tells the story of Ugomma and Joe Glass; Ugomma is a maid-celibate of the Ibina deity, and is forbidden by custom to sleep with any man. Joe Glass, a repatriate Negro succeeds in wooing her through his cunning antics. This earns him the hostility of the chief priest of Ibina, who decrees "a one must die" combat between him and Oriji. Eventually, Oriji kills Glass and gets ejected from the land by Attama, the chief priest, for spilling blood before the shrine of Ibina. The people of the community protest the death of Joe Glass, shattering the shrine and forcing Attama into abandoning the shrine and running for his life.

The ubiquitous presence of the ancestors in Kalu Uka's *Ikhamma* is a dramatization of omnipresence of the sacred in an African shrine. The sacred space of Ibina shrine is the performance space of the ritual that ushers in the Ohafia fishing festival, supervised by the powerful Ibina deity, whose chief priest, Attama, is seen as all knowing. Nneugo talks about Ibina in the dialogue with Joseph Glass:

Nneugo:

That is agreed, then,

Stranger. You shall present

Your case, and we ours

Before the omnipotent voice

Of our fathers, today,

The return day of our hunters. (19)

The Stranger in the above dialogue is Glass, who incidentally does not show any atom of respect or reverence for the sacred space or objects of the shrine; rather his interest is in Ugomma, the sacred nun of the shrine. Ugomma's position as a property of the divinity of Ibina Ukpabi does not bother him. Ugomma is dedicated from childhood to Ibina, by her mother Nneugo; as a holy offering to the gods. Hence, she becomes a kind of bride to Ibina, "Osu-Ibina" whose bodily virtue no mortal must enjoy. Thus, Ugomma reprimands Joe Glass as he makes advances on her:

Ugomma:

Take back your words, stranger

The forest of our fathers is full,

Full with trees, fruits, waters

That hear the slightest misplaced word.

I am that which no one may desire (10).

Nevertheless, Glass persists and does not heed to Ugomma's warning in his bid to win her love. The negation of African sacred by Anglo-Arabic agents in evangelization and islamization of Africa is obvious in Joe's seductive statements to Ugomma. Like Africans in the face of Anglo-Arabic incursion, Ugomma is already succumbing to the Strangers seductions when she says:

Ugomma:  
We must challenge the dead  
To leave us alone (14)

Without regards to what Ugomma is, a nun dedicated to the shrine of Ibina, Glass capitalizes on her weakness and lures her into a forbidden relationship; urging her on Glass says:

Joe Glass:  
Yes. Dead men are dead ideas.  
They must free us to face today  
I will help you. (14)

Those Glass refers to as dead men are Ugomma's father and her brothers, to Ugomma and Nneugo they are not dead, even if they are dead, they are not to be disregarded because if they are dead they are now the ancestors and should not be ignored or disrespected because they now constitute part of the African sacred. However, despite her weakness, Ugomma, rightly believes that it is dangerous for her to love a man unless the power of Ibina over her is severed. She, therefore, promises to help Glass with the secrets of the "udala" of Ibina (the secrets of the shrine) if only if he would help her to cut the leash that holds her to the shrine. Thus, Ugomma decides to aid Glass in destroying that which is sacred. She goes on to assist Glass in infiltrating the holy abode of Ibina. There is no other way one can explain the stranger's knowledge and bold banter with the priests of Ibina, namely Oriji and Attama. Having won the trust of Attama, Glass is admitted into the service of Ibina, in place of Oriji, who gives his robes to Glass, the stranger. He warns Glass:

Joseph:  
You have been robbed.  
You have entered the sanctuary of our fathers  
It is a cold and demanding crucible.  
It holds in secret flow the blood of gods.  
One mistake, Stranger one step out of tune  
In the dance, and restitution can only be  
By the hot forbidden lava

Of angry blood which drowns all offenders.  
Take care! (33)

Joe Glass thanks Oriji and accepts the challenge. His behaviour in scene vi, soon after his ordination, demonstrates clearly that his profession of loyalty to the residual religion is a hoax. He had not believed at all in the rhetoric of Oriji and Attama, nor did he believe Ugomma's initial declaration that she is sacred to Ibina and should not be flirted with. He is driven by one major force, his interest in Ugomma as a gateway into the secrets of the shrine and against all odds he lures her. In the dialogue below, it becomes obvious that the maiden of the shrine can no longer withstand Joe's antics and selfish desire and she says:

Ugomma:  
A void? What is a void? I carry,  
When, the sun streaks down my back  
Along the spring path, morning and evening,  
I carry more than a void! I fizzle  
With a dark cavernous treasures no one  
Must touch. (34)

Though, Ugomma is clearly tempted and overwhelmed by the scheming of Joe Glass, but she willingly gives herself into an "adulterous" affair as her faith fails her and Glass finally takes her. This becomes the height of desecration of the African sacred. Ugomma is no doubt part of the custodian of the peoples religion, that she succumbed to the antics of Glass is symbolic indicating how evangelization of Africa destroyed the African sacred confused the worshippers and deceitfully overthrew the old order. Hence, till today the conflict between the two (the old and new religion rages on)

First, Glass comes in disguise as one of the hunters of Ohafia (6). Systematically, he plants himself in the pubertine heart of the nun, Ugomma; cunningly, still he deceives the wise Attama and Oriji and becomes admitted into the mysteries of Ibina. All these he does, hoping to one day overthrow the worship of Ibina and then introduce a new religion –Christianity. He sings to Oriji:

Glass:  
Till my ransomed soul shall

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Find grace beyond the river...  
On the cross, on the cross,  
Be my journey ever,  
Till my ransomed soul shall  
Find grace beyond the river... (30)

Conversely, Joe Glass is fearless before Ibina and its priests, despite the dreaded pronouncements of Attama and Oriji, and even that of Nneugo. This is probably because his Christian belief makes him see the whole myth of Ibina and Attama as superstition and falsity. Without qualms he parries Oriji's witticisms, finally insinuating himself into the shrine. He feels no guilt when he is caught making love to Ugomma in front of the sacred place. Nneugo pleads with Attama to find a remedy through any sacrifice he would recommend to blot out her daughter's sin. Attama reproves her and affirms:

Attama:  
But the offenders themselves, mother,  
Look at them. They cling defiantly  
Against our own visage in the glut of  
sin (41).

As if the callous defiance of the shrine by Glass and the nun of the shrine is not enough; Glass continues to register his non-conformist stand. In the outburst below he says:

Glass:  
Sin? Oh, fire! My soul burns,  
Voice of Ancients, my soul is scalded  
Even as I hold this flesh.  
I sense her, sweet and real.  
Can you spare us to find the meaning?  
Of this new touch of our bodies? (41)

Attama eventually accepts Nneugo's plea for an atonement rite for the ablution of Ugomma's sacrilege, but the ritual cannot be completed as it is discovered that a figurine of the shrine of Ibina deity is missing. Frantically, everybody except Glass, searches for this effigy, which is discovered on the tourist Joe Glass by Oriji. The pollution is now complete. Attama's patience is worn out. He decrees a fight to finish between Oriji and Glass. Glass shows no remorse but engages Oriji who slays him in the duel. Dying, Glass says, "looking limply up" weakly holding Ugomma's hand:

Glass:  
Look. Look at my chest. Ugomma.  
Oriji. The scar of the Crucifix  
Still burns. That was another faith  
(44).

Thus, Joe's dying actions affirms Uka's notion of contemporaneity. Glass has infiltrated the sacred Ibina shrine, "the protector of the willing" according to Nneugo in scene II page 4, with another faith as reflected in the crucifix, a symbol of Christianity he is wearing. The death of Joe Glass, the wandering stranger is gateway to heroism even in death. Like Christ whose death became the path to his universal and eternal veneration, Glass' martyrdom, converts the whole people of Ohafia from their native religion, including Nneugo, the mother of the shrine. Attama's attempt to avoid a mob action by ousting Oriji ostensibly for shedding blood before the shrine does not persuade the zealots to have a change of mind. First Voice quickly informs him that his "calabash of wisdom is broke." (46) Second Voice tells him that he quibbles, while the third accuses him of equivocating (47). Allegedly, they accuse him of various crimes, same accusations against African traditional religions. Hence, in sheer panic, the old Attama sneaks off the shrine, abandoning his god, their god- Ibina! The mob demolishes the shrine and declares:

First Voice: Good riddance!  
Second Voice: Both of them. Oriji and that blind Fool. (47)

The extension of "the masquerade called religion" as an aspect of the Anglo-Arabic influence in Africa is part of Femi Osofisan's preoccupation in his play *Once Upon Four Robbers* selected for study. Osofisan captures the impact, of "the masquerade called religion" on Africa from the evils of the Muslim religion. In his *Once Upon Four Robbers*, he shows how Muslim religious leaders desecrated priesthood which is an essential aspect of the African sacred. Unfortunately these faceless Muslim priests arm criminals against innocent citizens, aiding the robbers to dispossess helpless citizens of their wares and belongings. Through the character Aafa, we see the dangers of Islamic spiritualists and their misuse of spiritual powers given to them by God for the good of mankind.

Osofisan treats the dangers of pervasive religious leaders, religion as an enemy of the

people and the threat of fanatical faith to human reasoning. The four robbers who in, Once Upon Four Robbers are products of the corrupt society took to robbery because of hunger and unemployment faced by the people in a society ruled by insensitive leaders. Faced by the problem of how they will not be caught during robbery operations and subsequent execution by the military government in power, the robbers stumble into an Aafa, Muslim priest who gives them magical power that enables them to rob without violence and without being apprehended.

However, the greed of one of the robbers who is so avaricious to steal from his colleague's led to their arrest by the soldiers who themselves are criminally minded as the robbers they are out to catch. Ironically, the soldiers, backed by the might of state guns, brazenly steal from the armed robbers they are supposed to arrest. Ironically, it is this set of soldiers who are to execute the armed robbers from whom they have stolen. This dilemma forces Osofisan to leave the ending of the play open-ended without proposing a clear cut solution to the problems raised in the play. His aim is to provoke thought rather than persuade the audience to adopt a particular action plan to the resolution of the conflicts.

Hence, amidst other themes of corruption in the government sector, greed and commodification; the playwright reveals how the Muslim religion debased the priesthood which was sacred in Africa and transformed it into a business of charlatans. He brings the activities of corrupt religious leaders to us through Aafa, a Muslim Priest and seer. Osofisan uses paradoxical technique to juxtapose religiosity and robbery in other to expose hypocrisy and deceit. Aafa encounters two of the robbers: Angola and Hasan as he prepares for prayers and the two robbers attempt to steal from him. He uses his magical powers on them, cast a spell on the robbers and they lose consciousness. Below Aafa invokes his powers through incantations and says. Aafa: "Robinajihini wahaali mimo yahamalum!" (17) In a stage direction, the playwright explains the impact and potency of these words as incantations (Angola and Hasan swivel towards each other instead and begin to embrace, grinning sheepishly) (17). Angola and Hasan are hypnotized, the other robbers, Major and Alhaja appear and Aafa invites them to join him in prayer. Major is startled to see the

condition of Angola and Hasan, he pleads with Aafa, but Alhaja is not moved. Alhaja sounds very confrontational and orders Aafa.

Alhaja:

release these men from your diabolical spell! (19).

Alhaji shows that some citizens recognize the antics of these corrupt religious leaders and in most cases are not easily intimidated by such magical powers. However, religious charlatans like Aafa do not give up easily; they rely on indoctrination and false hope for their victims.

Aafa addresses the robbers in such statements and says:

Aafa:

Not me, but Allah, whose ways are mysterious. He has chosen to reclaim these lost souls for his service. Who are we to intervene? See, their zeal is an example even to the devout (20).

Major, one of the weak robbers is the first to succumb to the sermons of Aafa. His response is an indication that he has been indoctrinated and therefore lacks reason to question whatever Aafa says. Hear him;

Major: I understand Aafa. We are sorry. (20)

Aafa cashes in on Major's weakness and uses it to convert the other robbers as seen in the dialogue below.

Aafa: Alright! I'll help you

Angola: We're no beggars!

Aafa: I said, help. I can make you rich

Hassan: You?

Major: How? (25)

Aafa:

I'll put a power in your hands that will take you out of the gutters into the most glittering palaces (26).

Aafa debases the position of the chief priest which is held sacred in Africa and uses the above dialogue laden with promises of power and wealth to convince the robbers. So like today's corrupt religious leaders, Aafa empowers the robbers against the society; to rob the people of their belongings, inflict suffering and poverty on the society, and consequently, generate



tension and conflicts. Alhaja affirms this when she says:

Alhaja:

I have known conflicts, old man. Look in the police records.

Violence, I feed on it. Don't think you can frighten me. (26).

## CONCLUSION

Kalu Uka employs an opposite technique in his treatment of contemporaneity from Femi Osofisan in *Once Upon Four Robbers*. While Uka feels that "the core of ritual" should be shattered, even by an alien religion, Osofisan is looking at negativities of such rituals even in the hands of unbelievers. Hence he reveals that whether people worship God from their heart or not they can manipulate religion to serve their own selfish purpose. Hence the study reveals the conflicts generated by foreign religions through selfish worshippers who may not even be true believers.

Looking at Africa as she is now, far more complex than the idyllic village of Ohafia and the mission of Glass, will one say that Glass and what he represents have done Africa good. The answer to the above question is: No! Joe Glass is an insincere character, with Machiavellian antics whose only concern is personal aggrandizement. To achieve this aim, Glass schemes and topples the residual religion- a religion as old as the people of Ohafia themselves; without giving any thought to what such action could mean for the natives. He desecrates the sacred nun of the shrine and steals a sacred artefact of Ibina, and dies fighting for his belief- a holy war.

For Africa to find lasting peace, there is need therefore, to appraise events of the past that impact on present conflict situations in Nigeria; so that peace builders will stop scratching the problem on the surface. Africa has to adopt what the researcher calls a mid way approach, if we must survive the impact of this hydra-headed monster called religious conflict: Inasmuch as everybody is encouraged to hold fast to what he believes, as is allowable by law, we should endeavour to let others decide for themselves how they will worship their God! This may be difficult for learned and pious people, who are convinced of the damnation that awaits believers of the traditional religion. Let us obey the great Prophet Mohammad in this where he

says: "Let there be no compulsion in religion" (Sura 2: 256)

Religious intolerance since its earliest practice is not acceptable to God. Even in ancient Israel where God is a jealous God, Elijah regretted the killing of the prophets of Baal, because forty days later, on Mount Horeb, he could only see the presence of God in a gentle breeze! (1 Kings 19: 12). One of the things that Martin Luther got wrong was the presence of love in hacking and slaying, in clubbing and stabbing. It was in the recognition of this error that Abraham had to see a ram held up in the bushes for his sacrifice to God in place of Isaac, his beloved son! (Gen. 22:13). Unfortunately religious leaders are yet to imbibe this symbolic Abrahamic vision of peace that was suppose to end human sacrifice in the name of religion.

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