

Linguistic Expression of Religious Identity and Ideology in Selected Postcolonial Nigerian Literature

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Abstract

One of the greatest threats to national development and the rights of individuals and groups in Nigeria and some parts of Africa is the growing increase in religious fundamentalism by major religious in the continent. The worsening economic fortunes of many African countries, poor and corrupt leadership, increase in ethnic nationalism, oppression of the minority by dominant powers and ideologies and the quest for freedom, external influences from extremist (Islamic & Christian) groups among others have been suggested as likely causes of religious fundamentalism in Africa. The postcolonial Nigerian nation has suffered calamitous losses from religious conflicts. Consequently, some of Nigeria's 21st Century writers have tried in their works to present a situation in which groups use language to construct individual and collective identity and ideology, legitimize their actions, and justify acts of violence against others. The grammatical resource of mood and transitivity employed by the writers enables us to access and appraise individual and group experiences, and intergroup relations in social interactions. The resources of language enable us to perceive how individuals and groups relate to each other in social activities and implicitly or explicitly sustain ideologies that support the structures of oppression and violence. Therefore, working within the tenets of critical stylistics and critical discourse analysis (CDA), this study aims at exposing the motives that underlie the expression of religious identity and ideology in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (PH henceforth), Chidubem Iweka's *The Ancient Curse* (TAC henceforth), and Uwem Akpan's *Say You're One of Them* (SYOT henceforth) and their implications for national stability

and development. The data reveal how the sociopolitical climate in postcolonial Nigeria breeds a culture of hatred, intolerance, violence, exclusion, and curtailment of individual and group rights in the name of religion, and how these acts are expressed in diverse discourse-grammatical patterns.

Key words: Religion; Identity; Ideology; Violence; Postcolonial Nigerian literature

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INTRODUCTION

Art in its diverse semiotic forms and dimensions has been used to express human conditions and experiences. Semiotic regimes such as literature (oral & written), painting, sculpture, filmic and cinematographic representations and others like music, sound, pictures and gestures can and have been used by artists to express human experiences, interpersonal and intergroup relations. They have also been used to encode, express or expose political and religious ideologies.

The Nigerian writer has commented on the diverse ills that have bedevilled the nation since independence. Social malaise such as corruption, leadership failure, political violence, military dictatorship, social inequity, and systemic failure at every level of governance has received due attention in the works of Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Cyprian Ekwensi, J.P. Clark, Christopher Okigbo, Femi Osofisan, Odia Ofeimun, Festus Iyayi, Ben Okri among many others. Others such as J.P. Clark, Ken Saro-Wiwa, Tanure Ojaide and Obari Gomba have used their works to draw attention to oil politics and

environment degradation in the Niger Delta and how such acts represent a form of aggression and domination against the people of the region.

All these and many more have received the attention of the Nigerian writer. However, one major issue that seems to be receiving the attention of some 21st Century Nigerian writers is that of religious extremism or fundamentalism with its attendant conflicts and catastrophes. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2006) portrays a case of Christian-catholic fundamentalism in the person of Papa (Eugene) who has no respect for other Christian denominations and maintains a zero tolerance for traditionalists. He is so obsessed with his catholic doctrines and ideologies that he "disowns" Papa-Nnukwu (his father) for not converting to Christianity (Catholicism in particular) and forbids members of his family from relating to him. He throws Anikwenwa out of his house, a man in his father's age group, for being a "heathen" and "a worshipper of idols." He also brutalizes members of his family for not complying with one catholic doctrine or the other. He is eventually killed by members of his family to checkmate his excesses.

Chidubem Iweka in *The Ancient Curse* (2007) reveals the fraud and deceit that underlie contemporary Pentecostalism, especially the so-called miracle-churches. The protagonist, Pastor Obi Aniemeka, worships Ogidi, a powerful village deity as a DD (Dibia in disguise, that is, native doctor in disguise). The syncretism is such that an altar is erected for Ogidi inside the church building and its powers are automatically activated whenever the name of "Jesus" (not Jesus Christ of Nazareth) is evoked. Obi brutalizes his friend Charlie, kills and consumes a pregnant woman in the full glare of his large congregation, and wants to sacrifice Chioma, his only daughter, in a failed ritual of reunion with Ogidi. Pastor Obi's fraud is eventually uncovered, his supernatural powers defeated and he makes a public confession and apologizes to all his victims.

Uwem Akpan's "Luxurious Hearses" (2008) is a fictional representation of the violent Muslim-Christian conflict, popularly known as "sharia war" that engulfed Nigeria in 2000. Apart from the identity of discourse participants and the location of events which have been fictionalized, every other detail of the text is a factual account of the 2000 religious crises that started in Kaduna and later spread to other parts of the country. Jubril, a Christian-Moslem, escapes from fanatic Moslems only to be killed by Christian fundamentalists, while Colonel Silas Usenetok, a mad soldier and die-hard traditionalist, is also lynched by the same Christian group for attempting to defend Jubril, a Moslem. The emerging scenario is that of large scale violence between north and south; Christians and Moslems; Christians and Traditionalists; Catholicism and Pentecostalism, etc with each group using the resources of language to justify its actions and attitude against the other.

All the texts under study reveal how individuals and groups use language to construct identity and assert their ideology. They also show how discourse participants use language to express their feelings, legitimize their actions and justify acts of discrimination and violence against others.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Critical stylistics and Critical linguistics (and of course critical discourse analysis) are interested in how the phenomenon of "othering" is linguistically represented or framed in discourse strategies and patterns. Critical stylistics investigates the ways in which social meanings are manifested through language. Norgaard, Montoro and Busse (2010, pp.11-13) observe that critical stylistics is inspired and informed by critical linguistics and critical discourse analysis (CDA). Studies in critical linguistics reveal that prejudice can pervade discourse and it can often go unnoticed except by those who are its target. Meriel Bloor and Thomas Bloor (2007, p.43) observe that "the most important function of CDA is to shed light on this kind of disguised attitude." CDA is interested in the discursive presentation of "difference" because of its ambivalent nature. "Difference" on the one hand is necessary for establishing meaning, language and culture, social identities and a sense of self. However, it is a site of negativity, aggression and hostility towards the "Other". A critical approach to discourse analyses the unequal social encounters between individuals and groups.

Eggs (2004, pp.10-11), working within the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), notes that "a higher level of context to which increasing attention is being given within systemic linguistics is the level of ideology...just as no text can be free of context (register or genre), so no text is free of ideology. In other words, to use language at all is to use it to encode particular positions and values." Similarly, Haynes (1992), drawing strongly from the systemic orientation, places ideology above every other level of language such as situation, discourse, form, and substance in his linguistic consideration of texts. This reveals the interconnectedness between language and ideology. Fowler and Kress (1979) contend that "ideology is linguistically mediated" (Young & Harrison, 2004, p.4). Thus, the resources of language can be used as a medium to reveal or conceal attitudes, beliefs, intentions and biases. They can and are often used to show social relations between groups and individuals. Young and Harrison in their insightful book entitled *Systemic Functional Linguistics and Critical Discourse Analysis: Studies in Social Change* (2004) explore the traditional interface between SFL and CDA. The discussions reveal how insights from SFL can illuminate studies that are CDA based in orientation. Ruth Wodak affirms that "an understanding of the basic claims of

Halliday's grammar and his approach to linguistic analysis is essential for proper understanding of CDA" (Young & Harrison, 2004, p.4). M.A.K. Halliday in his now classic essay "Language as a Social Semiotic: Towards a General Sociolinguistic Theory" (1975) identifies language as a social semiotic that enables participants to exchange meanings which are derived from every kind of social context (Halliday, 2007, p.171). Halliday perceives contexts as crucial to the study and understanding of language.

Young and Harrison (2004, p.1) identify three major areas where SFL and CDA connect: First, SFL and CDA share a view of language as a social construct, looking at the role of language in society and at the ways in which society has fashioned language. The second commonality is their shared dialectical view of language in which particular discursive events influence the contexts in which they occur and the contexts are, in turn, influenced by these discursive events. Third, both SFL and CDA emphasise the cultural and historical aspects of meaning.

Young and Harrison contend "there is then, a solid tradition that links SFL and CDA from the very advent of Critical Linguistics (CL), the precursor to CDA." Again, SFL "provides a solid methodology that can... help to preserve CDA from ideological bias." Young and Harrison also note that "one of the strengths of SFL for CDA is to ground concerns with power and ideology in detailed analysis of text in real contexts of language use, thereby making it possible for the analyst to be explicit, transparent, and precise" (4).

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), a multidisciplinary approach to textual analysis, is interested in the role of language in defining social relations along asymmetrical lines. CDA shows how issues of ethnicity, religion, inequality, and group dominance are expressed, enacted, legitimated and reproduced in text and talk (van Dijk, 1995, p.19). Critical discourse analysts like Norman Fairclough, Ruth Wodak and Tuen van Dijk align themselves with political agenda that is committed to challenging the emergence of discourses that promote social, ethnic, racial, gender and class inequality. Critical discourse analysts like Fairclough and Wodak have adapted the systemic functional approaches to CDA purposes. As our data are derived from instances of language use in situations of religious discrimination and violence in Nigeria, it will be useful to strengthen our reliance on SFL by drawing from the socio-cognitive model of van Dijk which recognizes not only how dominance is expressed, enacted and legitimated in text and talk but reveals how "powerful social actors not only control communicative actions, but indirectly also the minds of the recipients" (van Dijk, 1995, p.2). Van Dijk argues that discursive practices and constructions like religious sermons somehow influence the minds of the reader and hearer because they convey knowledge, affect opinions or change attitudes.

1. DATA ANALYSIS

Transitivity

Transitivity is the grammatical resource for construing experiences. In SFL, transitivity is used to describe ideational meaning. Ideational meaning concerns the linguistic representation of the experiential world, which in Halliday's view is constructed as configurations of participants (nominals), processes (verbals) and circumstances (adverbials) (Norgaard, Montoro and Busse (2010, p.163).

Ex1:

"One day I said to them, Where is this god you worship? They said he was like *Chukwu*, that he was in the sky. I asked then, Who is the person that was killed, the person that hangs on the wood outside the mission? They said he was the son, but that the son and the father are equal. It was then that I knew that the white man was mad. The father and the son equal? *Tufia!* Do you not see? That is why Eugene can disregard me, because he thinks we are equal" (PH, p. 92).

The text expresses the speaker's (Papa-Nnukwu) bewilderment at some Christian teachings and doctrines, particularly that of the equality of the father (God) and the son (Jesus Christ). The four interrogatives convey the speaker's confusion while the mental processes "knew", "see", and "think" index his feelings, attitude and perception of the white man and his strange teachings, and the indoctrination of his (the speaker's) son, Eugene, by the strange religion. The white man is also the carrier of the attribute "mad" because of his strange ideology that contradicts the African understanding that the son is subordinate to the father. Again, the sentence - "They said he was the son, but that the son and the father are equal" involves the use of two grammatically independent structures, that is, two structures that are syntactically equal, joined by a coordinating conjunction "but" to foreground the concept and ideology of equality between father and son which the speaker strongly interrogates. The African culture does not preach equality of father and son, thus, the reader needs to draw from the resources of culture to make sense of the speaker's rhetoric. Both SFL and CDA are interested in the exploration of the cultural and historical aspects of meaning. This explains why Toolan (1988, p.97) affirms that "[...] in our making sense of any particular text, we have extensive resources of knowledge (we can call this extratextual knowledge, or knowledge of the world, if that helps), which we can bring to bear on our interpretation of the text under scrutiny." This, of course, will vary from reader to reader and is further dependent on the accuracy of one's knowledge, and the interpretive evaluation one makes of that knowledge. He further identifies **facts** and **ideology** as the two adducible components of background knowledge. The critical reader with a good knowledge of the African culture will understand the ideological conflict between the speaker and his son (or between African Traditional Religion and Christianity). While Christianity preaches

the equality of father and son, the traditional religion/system subordinates the son by privileging the father over every other member of the family. Again, the reader relies on contextual and extratextual knowledge to make meaning of deictic and spatiotemporal orientations (**I, me, we, you, he, they, them,** and **where, outside, this, then, that**) which have been strategically deployed to heighten the ideological cleavage and conflict between the discourse participants.

Also significant of note is the rhetorical structure/pattern of the text. It opens with a question and an answer; then another question and another answer, then followed by a judgement – “It was then that I knew that the white man was mad”; then another two questions, no answer, then another judgement that is both an appraisal and a justification of an action – “That is why Eugene can disregard me, because he thinks we are equal.”

The rhetorical structure presents an addresser-addressee encounter or interchange cast in a reported speech format. Here, the addressee’s responses are reported by the addresser thereby denying the reader the privilege of hearing directly from the addressee. The text enables us to gauge the speaker’s feelings, beliefs, attitude, and perception of Christianity and the actions of his son, Eugene.

Ex 2

“The procedure was so far from Pastor Obi’s normal deliverance working that some of the women sprang up from their seats apprehensively. What Charlie saw when he got close behind Obi and looked over his head at the prostrate woman made his heart leap in panic? The green cloth had slipped off her body, leaving her stark naked. A pool of blood lay on the stretcher between her legs and more was oozing out. Her entire body strung out rigidly, her ankles stretched to the limit, toes pointed parallel to her frame. Her protruding stomach rolled and heaved actively apparently from much agitation within. Her eyes rolled backwards, revealing only the whites” (TAC, pp.97-98).

The text has two main purposes – to reveal the emotional state of Charlie at Pastor Obi’s bizarre deliverance procedure and the physical state of a woman at the mercy of a fake pastor. Thus, it was what Assistant Pastor Charlie “saw” when he “looked over” Obi’s head that caused his heart to leap in panic. The second sentence ends with an intrusive question mark thereby inviting the reader to imagine what could be going on in Charlie’s mind. Therefore the unconventional question mark reveals his emotional state (that of panic) on seeing Pastor Obi’s deliverance procedure. Again, the definitive “the” at the beginning of the first sentence foregrounds the inference that this particular deliverance is different from previous ones. It shows that this particular one is strange, abnormal and therefore a source of worry and fear to Charlie and the women who stare “apprehensively”. The adverbial group “apprehensively” seeks semantic and cognitive relationship with mental processes such as fear, fright, worry, disturb, and repel, etc which indicate one’s emotional and cognitive state.

The unidentified narrator wants the reader to imagine the emotional pain that a bewildered congregation experiences in the hands of an impostor pastor. The narrator also connects and juxtaposes the emotional pain of the congregation with the physical pain of the pregnant woman. Different parts of the woman’s body are carefully listed as points of pain and anguish. The processes deployed are such that depict the physical and emotional helplessness of the woman as underscored by her bodily contortion in response to the pain she is going through – her entire body “strung out rigidly”, ankles “stretched to the limit”, her toes “pointed parallel to her frame”, her protruding stomach “rolled and heaved actively”, while her eyes “rolled backwards.” She is also “stark naked”, bleeding, while more blood oozes out even though the narrative voice does not disclose the point or part of the body from which the blood gushes out but all the parts mentioned are synecdochically related – they refer to dying the pregnant woman.

The lexical choice and the underlying images it evokes (which appeal to the cognitive abilities of the reader/listener) are carefully made to project religious charlatanism as a form of physical, social and psychological exploitation of groups and individuals by dominant powers. This shows how the resources of language reveal the ideology of social inequality and dominance of one group by another. The writer’s task therefore is to raise the consciousness of the reader to recognize such charlatans and to resist their exploitation and dominance.

Ex 3:

“This matter is getting out of hand. Let no one say *Muslim* or *Islam* again on this bus. We have suffered too much already at the hands of Muslims [...] Make nobody mention anything *wey* be against God’s children!” (SYOT, 170).

Ex 4:

“It’s the Muslims who kill in Allah’s name [...] It’s not a laughing matter [...] No, we must correct the chief’s erroneous theology. By the grace of God, Christianity is pure forgiveness. Otherwise, this country would have gone up in flames by now. You pagans are like the Muslims...”
“It’s an insult to compare my religion to that barbaric religion! [...] I had warned you not to mention Islam or Muslim in this bus, remember?” (SYOT, 206)

Ex 5:

“They lined up his sons and warned them that their mob had already killed many Hausa Muslims who attempted to hide the infidels. But the sons of Abdullahi were as courageous as their father and insisted that they had no strangers in their midst. When the mob came in to search the house, they were a drove of locusts in their destructiveness. They said they were going to be rough on Mallam Abdullahi and his family because they had been informed that he had protected Christians and southerners in past riots. They searched for infidels in the kitchen...they looked for infidels in the barns...They hunted for infidels in the inner chambers of the man’s house” (SYOT, 210).

The language used in Ex. 3-5 depicts how the three main religions in Nigeria – Christianity, Islam, and Traditional Religion perceive each other and relate to each other. Relational processes “is” and “have” are used in the first text (Ex.3) to express the persistent persecution Christians have suffered and still suffer in the hands of Muslims. The command that forbids the word Muslim or Islam from being mentioned in the bus underlines the attitude of Christians to Islam and Muslims in general. The speaker wants his listeners to perceive Islam as a violent religion. Christians are the carriers of the attribute “God’s children” which presupposes that Muslims are “devil’s children” or of anti-Christ ideology hence their persecution of “God’s children.” The text therefore identifies and classifies the groups involved in the conflict into Christians vs Muslims; God’s children vs Devil’s children; the persecuted vs the persecutor, the victims vs the villain. Again, the assertion “we have suffered too much already at the hands of Muslims” by the speaker is to recollect a familiar experience by evoking a historical knowledge frame that demonstrates persistent Muslim aggression against Christians. The speaker’s intention is to justify the assumption that Christians have always been victims of premeditated aggression by the Muslim group and therefore to prompt the victims of the aggression to unite against a common foe.

In the second text (Ex.4) the speaker whom we can infer to be a Christian ascribes the attribute of “killer” to Muslims and that of forgiveness to Christians. The speaker also uses a negative attribute “pagan” for Traditional Religion and equates it with a “killer” religion – Islam. The speaker wants to present both religions in the negative and his (Christianity) in the positive. Ironically, the second speaker whom we can infer from the discourse context to be a traditionalist does not attack or counter Christianity but rather validates the first speaker’s assertion that Islam is a killer religion by labelling it “barbaric”. The speaker’s denial of any ideological or doctrinal affinity with Islam is an attempt by him to alienate his religion (Traditional Religion) from Islam, present him and his group in the positive, and align with Christians against Muslims.

The discourse participants being described in the third text (Ex. 5) use the attribution “infidel” and “strangers” for Christians to justify the act of aggression against them. The reason for ascribing these negative attributes to Christians is ideologically motivated. Some Muslims regard it a matter of religious obligation when non-Muslims (infidels), particularly Christians are killed in the name of Allah. The processes “searched” and “hunted” as used in the text are ideologically loaded. They are meant to depict the action of the fundamentalists as a deliberate act of genocide against Christian and Southern groups because moderate Muslims receive the same measure of punishment for shielding the targets of the attack from harm. This connects the experience intertextually with the 1994 Rwandan genocide where moderate Hutus

were killed by extremists for protecting their Tutsi neighbours. The metaphor “a drove of locusts” ascribed to the fundamentalists reveals their destructive instinct and capabilities. The narrator wants the reader to perceive Islam as a violent religion. However, the writer uses Mallam Abdullahi to construct a positive face for Islam as a religion of peace. The three excerpts from SYOT show how in-group members use the resources of language to align and to segregate in order to justify acts of discrimination and violence against out-group members.

Mood

Mood (at the clause rank) is the grammatical expression of interpersonal functions. It is a means of achieving communication by taking on speech roles in a communication encounter. Mood is the grammatical resource of the interaction between speaker and addressee, expressing speech functional selections in dialogue. Thus, the mood system provides a range of semantic categories in a speech encounter such as: giving information (statement); demanding information (question); and demanding goods and services (command). We shall examine how these resources of language are deployed in the texts under scrutiny to reveal social space and group relations in social discourse. They show how discourse participants use language to reveal or conceal their biases and attitudes so as to justify some premeditated actions against the other.

6. USE OF DECLARATIVES

- “I don’t like to send you to the home of a heathen, God will protect you” (PH, 70).
- “I didn’t have a father who sent me to the best schools. My father spent his time worshipping gods of wood and stone” (PH, 55).
- “Chineke! I thank you for this new morning! I thank you for the sun that rises [...] Chineke! I have killed no one; I have taken no one’s land, I have not committed adultery” (PH, 174).
- “You must belong to one of those old, dead Churches” (SYOT, 166).
- “I cannot allow you to insult my chieftaincy with your left hand” (SYOT, 203).
- “The gods of my ancestors will not allow you, Nduese, to die [...] They must protect you till we reach home and you get the right herbs” (SYOT, 228).
- “It’s you Christians and Muslims who’ve charmed Khamfi with your evil politics!” (SYOT, 230).
- “We no bi like all dis *nyama-nyama* churches!” (SYOT, 235).
- “I’m a member of the Pentecostal Explosion Ministries. We don’t believe in child baptism [...] Mary is an idol in Catholic worship [...] And child baptism prepaaares a child for hell...” (SYOT, 238).
- “Ogidi is angry with you for it’s been three hundred and fifty years since you gave it its last meal, ceremonial meal that is” (TAC, 53).

- “It’s a deity, and a powerful one at that. It must have someone to conduct the affairs of its shrine, and you are the chosen one” (TAC, 56).

- “[...] the day of the *dibia* is vanishing fast from convention. Christianity has become more fashionable. You know whom you are and what you have but you will be more acceptable if you function as a prophet, a D.D. *Dibia* in disguise as I’d like to put it [...]” (TAC, 76).

The declarative, as a rhetorical strategy, is used to make what is being expressed to appear more factual, forceful and convincing. It does not attempt to conceal the identity of the speaker (or actor) or referent as the imperative does. The declarative enables the speakers to express their ideology and understanding of the social, political and psychological circumstances around them. In sentences 1&2 the speaker reveals his biases against his father and the traditional religion. He demonizes them as evil. The speaker in sentence 3 presents what might be called a counter discourse to sentences 1&2. Sentences 4-9 show how groups perceive each other, that is, group prejudices against the other. The text shows that there are deeply rooted ideological differences between traditional religion and Christianity even though that has not yet led to a physical confrontation between both groups. It also reveals the lack of internal cohesion within the Christian group, thereby indicating there are in-groups and out-groups within the Christian membership (Catholicism versus Pentecostalism) with each group presenting itself as an authentic representation of the faith. Sentences 10-12 enable us to see the facts, culture and ideology of religious charlatanism in Nigeria.

7. USE OF INTERROGATIVE SENTENCES

- “What did you do there? Did you eat food sacrificed to idols? Did you desecrate your Christian tongue?” (PH, 77)

- “What is Anikwenwa doing in my house? What is a worshipper of idols doing in my house?” (PH, 78).

- “Where would I be today if my chi had not given me a daughter?” (PH, 91).

- “You knew your grandfather was coming to Nsukka, did you not?” (PH, 200).

- “You can’t be talking to me...in which world? Who are you?” (SYOT, 163)

- “YOU WANT INCITE DEM to kill me, *abi*?” (SYOT, 168).

- “Me? Christian?” (SYOT, 181)

- “Who told you to touch a royal father?” (SYOT, 195).

- “And you want to eject me from the bus because of my religion?” (SYOT, 233).

- “You have come into an unusual power. The question is can you handle it? How are you going to use or misuse it” (TAC, 76).

- “I thank you for not mentioning Ogidi but I ask, why

do you seek that which you already have?” (TAC, 96).

- “Pastor, what have you done to her?” (98).

In this part of the study we examine the use of interrogatives as a means of realizing interpersonal relations (tenor) in a speaker and addressee encounter. Our analysis also reveals that interrogatives serve as markers of identity, ideology, power relations and social space. Sentences 13, 14 & 16 above reveal the ideology of Christian fanaticism as the speaker’s questions were not just intended to elicit information from the addressees but also to stress the irreconcilable doctrinal and ideological differences between the adherents of Christianity and the traditional religion. In the estimation of the speaker, the traditional religion is evil and inferior to Christianity hence enough reasons to justify the acts segregation and violence against the addressees. Sentence 15 is an interrogation of the patriarchal ideology that privileges men over women in social and religious affairs in most African societies. Sentences 17-20 from *Say You’re One of Them* indicate the mood and attitude of participants in a period of intense religious conflict. The foregrounding of most parts of sentence 18 in capital letters and the brisk and abrupt nature of sentence 19 reveal the role of identity in a time religious upheaval. They underlie the fear and tension raging in the mind of the speakers because of the pervading atmosphere of social insecurity. While the voice in sentences 17 & 20 wants to establish the social space between the speaker and the addressee, which appears to be asymmetrical, the speaker in sentence 21 is protesting the discrimination meted to him on the ground of his religious identity and belief. To the addressees (the referential “you”), the speaker is an outsider because he belongs to a different religion. Sentences 22-24 underlie the uncertainties that accompany a mendacious and criminal acquisition of spiritual powers by charlatans. While the first (22) is a note of caution the last (24) underscores the negative implications of an apparent misuse of such powers. The interrogatives reveal that both the deceiver and the deceived are victims of the situation they constructed. Both are engaged in the ironical search for what they already have.

8. USE OF IMPERATIVE CONSTRUCTIONS

- “What is a worshipper of idol doing in my house? Leave my house!” (PH, 98).

- “Look away! Women cannot look at this one!” (PH, 94).

- “Chineke! Bless me. Let me find enough to fill my stomach. Bless my daughter, Ifeoma. Give her enough for her family [...] Chineke! Bless my son, Eugene. Let the sun not set on his prosperity. Lift the curse they have put on him” (PH, 175).

- “Welcome to the temple of believers” (TAC, 51).

- “Hold it there, don’t let go! [...] Send it back, boy, come on now [...]” (TAC, 77).

- “Stop! Don’t come any closer [...] Get out of here now! Get out! (TAC, 112).
- “Let no one say Muslim or Islam again on this bus” (SYOT, 170).
- “Cancel de debt now or else...” (SYOT, 181).
- “May Mami Wata drown your stupid head!” (SYOT, 163).
- “Now now, Jesus! Save us, Holy Spirit! Reveeal to us the evil in this bus” (SYOT, 237).

Imperative constructions begin with the elements of the process rather than the participants (particularly, the Actor). It involves the deletion of the subject/agent giving the order/command/request. Imperatives enable us to know the status and power relations of discourse participants. They reveal the social roles, statuses, personal attitudes and intentions of the speakers. Imperatives enable the writer to construct and present the social and personal relations of speakers and their attitudes to each other. Except for sentences 27 & 28 which are requests/prayers the rest are rendered in the form of command. The structures of the sentences reveal the social roles, attitudes and intentions of the speakers. Each speaker seems to possess certain social power or control over their addressees. Even sentence 34 that is supposed to be a prayer is issued as a command to Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit to perform certain task within a particular time frame indexed with the temporal deixes “Now now.” The deictic items underscore the urgency of the request/prayer. In all, the structures of the sentences reveal a society that is dominated by fear, violence and unequal power relations between groups and individuals.

CONCLUSION

Our data reveal how individuals and groups in the Nigerian society perceive and interact with each other because of their religious identities and beliefs. The resources of transitivity enable us to perceive the experiences of participants involved in religious discourse and situations. Mood presents the social relations between individuals and groups and their implications

for national development. Our study shows that language use in religious contexts is ideologically mediated because it enables individuals and groups to express their beliefs, attitudes and biases towards others. The texts therefore show how individuals and groups use language to construct individual and collective ideologies and identities, legitimize their actions, and justify acts of violence against others. These individuals and groups attempt to persuade or coerce others to accept the world view and ideology they represent. The literary discourse under study makes us to understand the implications of religious fundamentalism and charlatanism on national development. Besides breeding orgies of violence and destruction, disrupting traditional fellowships and bonds between groups, it stunts economic growth and development. The writers therefore employ the medium of art as a semiotic mode to warn of the evil consequences of religious extremism and criminality which are gradually becoming a norm in Nigeria and other parts of Africa.

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