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A Psychoanalytic Critique of Trauma Aesthetics in Ferdinard Oyono's Houseboy

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ABSTRACT

This article engages in a psychoanalytic critique of the trauma aesthetics in Ferdinand Oyono's *Houseboy*. The study employs an explanatory research design, using qualitative methods to delve into the under-researched dimensions of colonial trauma depicted in the novel. Explanatory research is particularly suited for this study as it addresses problems that lack extensive previous research, sets priorities, generates operational definitions, and offers well-developed models for understanding complex issues. The study reveals that characterization is crucial in exposing colonial trauma, prominently illustrated by the character of Toundi, who suffers immensely on his deathbed. The agony of Toundi, along with other characters like Calisia, Sophie, and Toundi's sister, underscores the deep psychological scars inflicted by colonial oppression.

Keywords: Aesthetics, Houseboy, Psychoanalytic critique, Tragic end, Trauma

INTRODUCTION

Ferdinand Oyono begins his haunting tragedy at the end of a Cameroonian houseboy's life. "Brother, what are we," Toundi Ondua asks as he enjoys his last arki, only minutes before his death, "what are we black men who are called French?"[1]. It is a question that echoes throughout the novel. *Houseboy*, the story of an African man who from a young age served white men in his native Cameroon, depicts the plight of Africans who suffered brutality and subjugation under the boot of colonial authority. It offers a glimpse into the life of an articulate African, Toundi Ondua, who was at first intoxicated by the offerings of the French, and determined to assimilate into their culture, but later realized the hypocrisy of European culture and despised its rule of his people [2]. It becomes very clear within the first pages of the novel that there is a strong undercurrent of Africa's struggle to maintain its unique identity, despite European incursion, and emerge from colonial rule. Oyono uses two major themes to develop his story: Christianity and sexuality act as the most important agents of European colonial society in his short but powerful novel. The actions of the white authorities are determined through the binary between these two divergent forces and their moral inconsistencies are made plain. The Africans who lived within the Cameroons had little choice but to struggle despite the Europeans' apparent lack of fidelity to their God, their morals, and themselves[3]. In many ways, Christianity was the first wave of the European imperialist invasion. Christian missionaries, spreading the word of God to African children through sugar cubes and threats of hellfire, stormed the beaches and made way for the European occupation. Father Gilbert, though he appears a benevolent fellow, and is adored by Toundi, is an elitist and patronizing white man, taking the poor black boy from his family eagerly, and training him to become the perfect specimen of African possibility; "his masterpiece[4]." Gilbert goes so far as to show off "his boy" to the other white colonists, treating him as if he were a pet. Oh, how the other boys in town envied Toundi's new clothing and the opportunities made possible through his acceptance by the whites! Oyono's use of Christian paternalism displays the way that Christianity was sold to Africans.

Through treats and trinkets, they drew children in "like throwing corn to chickens," and with threats of eternal damnation, they made them stay, not even knowing where or whythey had abandoned their traditional religions[5]. It would seem the young and naive were the missionaries' first conquest in Africa. It is made clear by Toundi's affection for Gilbert, and the feelings of protection he has within the father's grace. European paternalism is obvious throughout the novel, but it is made most pointed through Father Gilbert's death. Killed by a falling branch while he hurried to retrieve mail from his native land, he is called a martyr. "I suppose because he met his death in Africa," Toundi says. A martyr: killed in action on the front lines of the heathen world, I suppose. After Father Gilbert's funeral, Toundi is changed[6]. "I have died my first death," Toundi says, as he sees his naivety die with Father Gilbert. He mourns his adopted father, but through this, he mourns himself. Here, the story changes and a new chapter begins. Henceforth, Toundi is made increasingly aware of the hypocritical actions of the French colonialists. Gilbert's replacement, Father Vandermeyer, is immediately shown to be a poor representative of both the church and "God's love." Early in the novel, the young men are sent away from his screaming obscenities during a bout of malaria, and after Gilbert's death, he offersno words of wisdom or comfort to the community which is so broken by the passing. With the death of Father Gilbert, so also dies Toundi's innocence[7].

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As our protagonist is passed from the church to the state at the suggestion of Father Vandermeyer, Toundi finds himself within another realm of European hypocrisy. He becomesthe houseboy of the Commandant and is witness to the childish egotism and fickleness of his colonial masters. Throughout the novel, the white settlers appear unhappy, displeased at their lot in the sad land of the heathens, and uncomfortable in the heat of the African sun. Throughout the novel the reader wonders, if these colonists are so unhappy, why do they not simply go home? Constantly they complain at the "state of things" yet remain in the colony, breaking the Africans'backs to maintain a position of authority[8]. One character, the French agricultural engineer referred to only as "Sophie's lover," gives us one example of how dishonest and hypocritical the whites can be, especially when controlled by their sexual appetite. Sophie, the engineer's black mistress, exclaims about her foolhardiness for not fleeing the man who keeps her around for sex, yet hides her as a secret from other colonists. The relationship, and the engineer's attachment to Sophie, is made more hypocritical when Toundi receives a threat from the engineer not to have relations with her. The engineer hides his lust for Sophie from other Europeans, yet he is jealous of her with other Africans[9]. Ultimately, Sophieacts out her desperate wish and flees to Spanish Guiana, relieving the engineer of severalthousand francs. Angry and ashamed, he accuses Toundi of the theft of his money and his woman; both items he treats as material commodities. The most important display of European hypocrisy is in the relationship of the Commandant and his wife, referred to only as "Madame." The Madame proclaimed the most beautiful woman inthe region wastes little time before she begins an affair with Monsieur Moreau, the director of Dangan's prison. At first, she hides her relationship. She is a Christian woman and the wife ofthe highest-ranking official in the area. Soon though, she is overtaken and begins seeing him almost daily, kissing him even in the open afternoon sun. When her thinly veiled secret is out, known seemingly to every African in town, rather than breaking off her relationship with the director, she becomes rancorous towards her servants, finding fault in all that they do and projecting her fallibilities onto them for their knowledge of her secret[5]. Interestingly, her troubles do not begin until after an interesting encounter with Toundi. Though previously, the Madame paid him little to no attention– his heart broken as she gazed upon the garden and had forgotten he was there– things changed swiftly after their journey to the market. In response to the incessant cat calls the Madame received but did not understand during their trip, Toundi explained the locals' lust for her. "That is very nice of them," the Madame responds,but a flicker in her eyes reveals the transformation that has taken place. In Toundi's next passage,the Madame questions him about his job, and then subsequently his love life. While Toundi doesn't realize it, the Madame lusts for him, not as a man but as a lover; merely an object to satisfy herself with[10]. "You only have to look at her eyes when she talks to you," Kalisia reveals later. Yet another white colonist wishes to own an African, both sexually and economically. It is no wonder the Madame turned to Moreau. "I'd say she couldn't do without a man for even a fortnight[11]," Kalisia explains. "I thought of all the priests, all the pastors, all the white men, who come to save our souls and preach the love of our neighbours. Is the white man's neighbour only other white men?[11]".

Toundi's sorrowful question speaks to the injustices of the French colonial policy of assimilation. In francophone Africa, the colonized were taught that by learning to speak, act, and believe like a Frenchman, they could indeed become French; as much a citoyen as any man born beneath le Tour d'Eiffel [1]. This policy was, in the end though, a bald-faced lie. Whether theFrench believed their lie or not, neither their hearts nor their country would open to including their colonial subjects. No matter the rank, education, poise, or beauty of the Africans who wished to assimilate, they remained lower even than the most unsavory and downtrodden white Frenchman. No matter what an African could do, he was still black, and could never overcome the hurdle of acceptance into French culture. This widespread belief reveals the inherent racism underlying the entire imperial enterprise. It is prevalent throughout Oyono's novel. Even if Africans adopted European ideas and assimilated into their culture, they still could not be good enough. The one character that disagrees, Jacques Salvain, the headmaster of the school, makes a scene by comparing the lack of morals in Cameroon with the lack of morals in Paris. Even he takes a paternalistic stance though, encouraging Africans that they can be as good as Europeans, yet judging them by a European model of "good[12]." The group of white colonists asks themselves fearful questions as they sit and contemplate the immigration of "natives" to Paris. "What would happen to civilization?" The French policy of assimilation can be called patronizing at its very best. Oyono depicts the French treatment of Africans as if they were animals throughout the novel. Gilbert, as he throws his corn to the chickens; Toundi, as he feels like a parrot being lured by treats or even as the "Kingof the Dogs," the servant of the Commandant; always the Africans are emasculated and infantilized. "I am the thing that obeys," Toundi says, accepting his fate from a young age. If an African becomes a Frenchman, then, does he become un chein français? "Who are we black men who are called French?[13]" The question echoes in my heart. In the end, Toundi's fate is to suffer a tragic, yet heroic death. Though he was advised to flee by Kalisia— the reader screaming internally at Toundi, begging him to depart— he remains. Is it pride? Is it honor? Is it folly? The truth is not revealed. Since he is led like a lamb to the slaughter, Toundi retains his pride until the end[14]. His humor never fades. Joking even with the sergeant who was sent to beat him, he laughs, knowing the short time he has left. Toundi is beaten to within an inch of his life, in a chapter rife with similes to Christ's crucifixion, yet he retains his dignity. "I felt pleased to think that neither the Commandant nor M. Moreau nor Sophie's lover," he says with pride, "nor any other European in Dangan could have stood up to itas we did."

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Where once the Houseboy had been the servant, "the thing that obeys," in his death, he had become the storm. Gathering his last ounce of strength and courage, Toundi flees the hospital, running to Spanish Guinea as he was once advised. In a clear allusion to Christ, as Toundi enjoys his last cup of rum with a wink, he says "I am finished… they got me. Still, I'm glad I'm dying well away from where they are." Even in death, his spirit could not be contained. "How wretchedwe are," he said once as he watched two fellow Cameroonians, beaten to death for a crime they probably had not committed. Yet, in using the plural pronoun, the reader gets the impression that Toundi refers not only to his black countrymen, it seems he is speaking to all of humanity. This isechoed on the final page of the novel by Mendim me Tit, the man ordered to beat Toundi, when with tears in his eyes he says, "poor Toundi… and all of us[16]." How wretched we are indeed. *Houseboy* by Ferdinand Oyono offers us an interesting peek into the life of a Cameroonian shortly before it declared its sovereign independence from France. It is not clear exactly when the novel is supposed to have taken place, but based on Cameroon's unique colonial history, the reader may assume that it took place during the 1950s. Though it is fiction, it provides a strong African voice in a time of great turmoil. Written in 1956, four years before Cameroon achieved independence, it is a good representation of the anti-colonialist literature that was prevalent at the time in both the Cameroons and all of Africa. Cameroon, and its neighbors the Anglophone North and South Cameroons, struggled to find a cohesive Cameroonian identity. Neither dictated by language, religion, family, or tribe, the three separate states ultimately united to form the United Republic of Cameroon, a nation built of negritude and the pride of being a Cameroonian[17]. Many a literary scholar have written articles and done studies on Ferdinand Oyono's *Houseboy*. A good number of them have categorized the text as an exploration of colonial suffering, others have branded it an epitomized case of religious hypocrisy as seen in the behaviour of the white missionaries. However, little scholarly work has been done on the analysis of colonial trauma in the creative texts written by Francophone postcolonial writers. This is a gap that this study attempted tosuccessfully fill using *Houseboy* as a primary source of data analysis. The textual analytical approach is adopted as the defining variable to analyze colonial trauma in Ferdinand Oyono's *Houseboy*.

Theoretical Framework

The study was grounded in the psychoanalytic theory[18] of literary criticism. The basis of this choice was the fact that trauma has a lot to do with the character's psychology and mindset. Psychoanalytic literary criticism is literary criticism or literary theory which, in method, concept, or form, is influenced by the tradition of psychoanalysis begun by Sigmund Freud. Psychoanalytic reading has been practiced since the early development of psychoanalysis itself and has developed into a heterogeneous interpretive tradition. As Celine Surprenant writes, 'Psychoanalytic literary criticism does not constitute a unified field. However, all variants endorse, at least to a certain degree, the idea that literature ... is fundamentally entwined with the psyche[19]. Psychoanalytic criticism views the artists, including authors, as neurotic. However, an artist escapes many of the outward manifestations and results of neurosis by finding in the act of creating his or her art a pathway back to saneness and wholeness. The main belief of perspective personality is from the major perspectives. Which describes the different patterns in personality. Psychoanalysis is defined as a set of psychological theories and therapeutic techniques that have their origin in the work and theories of Sigmund Freud. The way that people behave is largely influenced by their unconscious drives. The development of personality is mostly influenced by the events of early childhood. Freud suggested that personality was largely set in stone by the age of five[20]. The Unconscious Mind is a reservoir of feelings, thoughts, urges, and memories that are outside of our conscious awareness. Most of the contents of the unconscious are unacceptable or unpleasant, such as feelings of pain, anxiety, or conflict. According to Freud, the unconscious continues to influence our behavior and experience, even though we are unaware of these underlying influences[20]. The Humanistic Perspective of Personality focuses on psychological growth, free will, and personal awareness. It takes a more positive outlook on human nature and is centered on how each person can achieve their potential. The Trait Perspective of Personality is centered on identifying, describing, and measuring the specific traits that make up human personality. By understanding these traits, researchers believe they can better comprehend the differences between individuals.

Colonial Trauma in Houseboy

Muvuti [21] points out that colonialism, the African slave trade, the distorting dynamics of the East-West superpower conflict in the post-independence era as well as the current relegation of Africa to subservience and on-going unrest in the global community are traumatogenic experiences that have ravaged the continent. This view captures the historical, contemporary, and on-going forces that impose a multi-layered traumatic character to life on the African continent as depicted in literature. For example, the term "slavery" is almost naturally prefixed by the adjective "African" while meaningful contribution by Africans to global issues is something of a misnomer. Meagher[22] highlights the disparity that arises from the fact that Africa was not the only continent to experience colonization. He argues that countries such as the United States, Canada, South Korea and Australia were also once colonies yet they have now risen to superpower status, becoming "secondary exporters of investment capital to Africa and exploiters of the continent's resources" while Africa remains locked in

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underdevelopment and unending unrest. This renders the explanatory orthodoxy of colonialism as the major contributor to Africa's underdevelopment and perpetual unrest rather problematic. It is quite apparent that the problems the African continent faces are a result of complex enduring forces, external in nature, but which find in the African psyche a conducive "petri dish" to thrive in. Could one of these factors be the African's inherent religiosity? This consideration begs the question, is religiosity in itself strengthened or weakened by opposing paradigms? Of the many negative pictures of Africa that make up what is referred to as Afro-pessimism, the Rwandan genocide is arguably the most significant in recent history. Not only was this event alarming in its occurrence but more so in its intense brutality. The free use of machetes to decapitate and dismember victims characterized this violence and through her fictional narrative, Muvuti [21] captures this violence in her graphic descriptions of the anonymous "woman bound hand and foot". Muvuti [21] records, "She has been raped. A pickaxe has been forced into her vagina. She died from a machete blow to the nape of her neck." The young "Zairean woman wholooked like a Tutsi" witnesses the murder of a man whose throat is slit in front of her house; the cold-blooded murder of her baby; and suffers gang rape while unconscious. This dehumanizing brutality allows the reader to appreciate the extent of animality to which the perpetrators had sunk. Winterdyk and Antonopoulos[23] summarise the factors at the heart of the genocide, citing thequestion of identity as one of the most fundamental. The divisive discourse of Hutu and Tutsi rivalry which sought to elevate one *people* over the other; the question of "racialisation" of the two identities and of course, the influence of colonialization upon the African psyche are among the causes. What role is played by African religiosity in this matrix of causes? Due to the sheer magnitude of the Rwandan genocide, much has been written and produced to immortalise the memory of this "failure of humanity".

Notorious Religiosity

Religion in much of world and African literature today is largely portrayed as being inimical to human progress, science and reason Religion in much of world and African literature today is largely portrayed as being inimical to human progress, science and reason[24]. The religious point of view is largely seen as biased and prejudiced, while a secular view is objective and neutral and vice versa. John Mbiti famously declared that Africans are "notoriously religious". This manifestation of religion is referred to as *homo religious*[25]. Abdura[26] postulates that, in the strictest sense, the great majority of the irreligious are not liberated from religious behaviour, theologies, and mythologies. For example, he notes thatMarxism reflects eschatological views in its belief in an "absolute end to history"; nudism and movements for sexual liberty veil an Edenic discourse of a return to an epoch of sexual purity before the fall of man; and psychoanalysis in its methodology betrays "initiatory descents into hell". Africans maintain strong ties with religious beliefs and practices, which form a solid foundation for the African worldview and permeate its artistic and literary productions. Mbiti's observation of the notoriety of African religiosity cannot be underrated. By this statement, he highlights that the African is inherently *homo religiosus*. This appellation, far from being eisegetical, is based on observation and recognition of the existence of religiousness in the various aspects of life for the Black African, be it in their religion, economic and legal practices as well as social, moral,and ethical considerations. What Mbiti is essentially noting is that religion in the African context permeates every aspect of life and is not neatly compartmentalised as a separate domain. Africans, in general, distinguish between but do not separate society, culture, and religion as separate domains[27]. This further complicates religion in the African context in thatit is always viewed as "cultural religion" and culture is always "religious culture"[27]. We may therefore suggest that the framework by which Africans rationally or irrationally interpreted their world was founded upon an inherent religiosity. Daniel McIntosh[28] argues that religion, while operating from within a cognitive schema, goes beyond a simple organisation of beliefs but in a broad sense exists outside the person in the form of texts, symbols, and traditions,and in a narrower sense appears in the form of individuals' rites, habits and other behaviours. The literature of the continent has long recognized and criticised the religiousness of its inhabitants and sought to demonstrate how this religiosity has been instrumental in advancing colonial ends or playing to the tune of a traumatic and traumatizing narrative discourse. Africa without instability, war, exploitation, famine, brutality, and wholesale death is so utopian aview, it borders on the impossible. While these traumatic realities exist all over the world, the African continent has by far epitomised their prevalence. Africa is in a constant "state ofemergency", a perpetual nervous condition and reasons for this vary from religious, through anthropological to political, or a complex combination of all of these factors. This reality of trauma has provided the fodder for over a century of literature on the subject, practicallyrelegating any non-traumatic theme about Africa to quasi-irrelevance[29]. Jackson[30] argues that "all aspects of contemporary African writing originate in the context of a massive, continent-wide experience of deep social trauma". Literature on this trauma took the character of anticolonial writing (Brière) during the colonial period such as that of Frantz Fanon; Alexandre Awala-Biyidi (Mongo Beti) and Ferdinand Oyono, and has proliferated into a wide array of postcolonial work by such writers as Florent Couao-Zotti; Calixthe Beyala, Abdurahman Waberi, and Ahmadou Kourouma to name a few who each represent the diverse ramifications trauma has had and continues to exert on the African continent. No more evidently has this reality been revealed than in the trauma narratives on the Rwandan genocide of 1994. Rwanda, according to Muvuti[21], has since come to symbolize

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the "stamping out of life"and the "existential negativity that Africa often emblematizes in the global imaginary". Sigmund Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* explains trauma as the mental disturbance of survivors of devastating events that involve a risk to life, such as disasters, accidents, or war[31]. This definition albeit specific to psychology and psychoanalysis allows us to see the link between traumatising events and the traumatic response. Véronique Tadjo's depiction of the genocide in Rwanda in her fictional narrative with its multifarious manifestations such as violence, rape, assassination, and war captures the fundamentally and inherently negative character of trauma. Among, the numerous perspectives on the psychosocial phenomenon of trauma, is the religious paradigm, which this paper will consider more closely. The debate on religion is age-old, complex, and controversial and I do not aim to postulate any new theoretical reading on the phenomenon. Rather, this paper acknowledges over half a century of research in the area of trauma and millennia of scholarship on religion. Religion is undoubtedly a very complex conceptowing to the multiple and sometimes divergent perspectives from which it can be approached. For this paper, however, I will use Dobbelaere's [32] definition of religion as a dominant belief in transcendental powers, irrespective of whether they are benevolent or malevolent. He elucidates that it is African peoples' conscious and sub-conscious awareness of and preponderant recourse to the transcendent in virtually all they do, irrespective of whether those activities are formal or informal, social or personal, political or economic, didactic or recreational. The religious components in any of these may be overt or covert; however they are present, they undergird human existence. For the Africans, the issue in the discussion of religion is not primarily ethics but function, as African religiosity is essentially utilitarian, not necessarily implying piety[33]. This understanding distinguishes religiosity in the African context from more classical definitions of religion such as belief in a supernatural being or beings; belief in a transcendent reality; distinction between the sacred and the profane; and a code of conduct for a temporal community that shares a world view[34]. Religion is more than belief in a single set of claims that are supposed to be true, rather, "there is a multitude of religions" and no single thing is called religion. Indeed, the discussion of religion is often blurred with ethical, theological, and philosophical considerations which render it difficult to neatly define. Albert Ellis[35] contends that it seems silly to say that someone is religious because he happens to be philosophic or ethical; and unless we rigorously use the term religion to mean some kind of faith unfounded on fact, or dependency on some assumed superhuman entities, we broaden the definition of the word so greatly as to make it practically meaningless. While this view may be true from a "militant atheist" perspective as Fiala[36] prefers to call it, it is based on an epistemological interpretation of religion and thus does not take into account the complex symbols of religion rendering this view reductionist especially with regards to African religiosity. Oladipo[37] argues that religion is not only belief in a metaphysical being but also a disposition *towards* that which one believes in. Thus, religion and religiousness are essentially God-consciousness and the physical, personal, and institutionalized articulation of such a consciousness in everyday life. These considerations of religion accommodate African Traditional Religion (ATR) which has been defined as "the indigenous religious beliefs and practices of the Africans"[38]. The criticism of religion traces its roots to and gained its impetus *inter alia* from the French Revolution of 1789 which owed its success in part to centuries of philosophical activism and volumes of literary expression bearing an anti-religious rhetoric by such philosophers as Hegel and Voltaire. This revolution was the culmination of a growing socio-political dissatisfaction with absolute power which in its highest form was God, and in its human manifestation was the oppressive system embodied in the tyrannical rule of monarchies who- like God- presumably enjoyed absolute power. By challenging the established order, the revolutionaries epitomised the quest to bring about the fallibility of the idea and existence of God. Since then, the "major intellectual figures that influenced modernist thought-Nietzsche, Freud, Marx, and Darwin-were often perceived as offering ideas to replace or dissolve religious ways of thinking"[39]. These scholars challenged the notion of the religiosity of man. African Francophone literature draws significantly from Western philosophies, including those of the 1789 Revolution, withtheir tendency to discredit religion as a viable means of objectively viewing reality. The success of the Enlightenment has however been challenged by such scholars as Olabimtan[40]who provides the following perspective:

> The twentieth century presented us with the dismal failure of the enlightenment movement in the two successive World Wars. In the consequent search for meaning beyond the pretensions of this movement, there re-emerged in the West the alternative view to the prevailing irreligion [5]

This renewed search for meaning found expression in the appreciation of the profundity of human existence and the plausibility of a transcendent reality beyond the mechanistic view that the enlightenment had hitherto espoused. This search for alternative meaning to life and reality in the traumatized West brought into relevance again the presupposition of a religious worldview that understands reality as beyond the material and human beings as existential beings. By asserting that the "Western scientific" approach ushered in by the Enlightenment gave way to a more inclusive approach after the reality of its failure following the two World Wars, Olabimtan [40] postulates that this viewpoint was "only a phase in Western study of cultures", thus not immutable. In other words, the age of scientific reason was arrived at as a reaction to circumstances unique to Europe at that time, which circumstances cannot be arbitrarily applied to the African context. This viewpoint is in harmony with the

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bulk of African anticolonial and postcolonial literature. Titles of novels such as *God's Bits of Wood* (1960), *The Poor Christ of Bomba* (1956); *Devil on the Cross* (1980) and *Allah is Not Obliged* (2000), to name a few, not only reveal the ubiquity of religion in African literature, but they also nuance a thinly-veiled hostility to religion-or more precisely "imported" religion, which Sanni[38] describes as religions that are not uniquely African, but which infiltrated African societies through their interactions with other continents. Our starting assumption in this study is that trauma is ubiquitous in Francophone African Literature. We also assert that, while religion is similarly ubiquitous on the continent, *homo religiosus* or *primitive religiousness* features simply as a footnote to the literature on ethnic tensions that provoked the Rwandan genocide. This study in no way seeks to discuss religion or philosophy or limit the multifaceted traumatogenic experiences of the Rwanda genocide to canonical interpretations. Drawing on work published by a variety of scholars, this paper argues that trauma in modern postcolonial francophone literature is ubiquitous. It reveals itself in the post-independence contradictions and injustices as depicted by modern francophone authors and thinkers whose subject matter is largely dominated by such motifs as corruption, genocide, war, violence, insanity, rape, poverty, and disillusionment, which all accommodate a direct challenge to religion.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Sources of Data

The researcher will use the explanatory research design based on the use of qualitative approach. Explanatory research is normally conducted for a problem that was not well researched before, demands priorities, generates operational definitions, and provides a better-researched model. The researcher used the Ferdinand Oyono's *Houseboy* as the primary source of data.

Data Collection methods

The researcher used the case study and critical reading methods in an attempt to collect theresearch related information.

Characterisation and Trauma in Houseboy

According to the Merriam Webster dictionary[41], trauma is a disordered psychic or behavioral state resulting from severe mental or emotional stress or physical injury. Trauma is the response to a deeply distressing or disturbing event that overwhelms an individual's ability to cope, causes feelings of helplessness, and diminishes their sense of self and their ability to feel a full range of emotions and experiences. The author shows that Africans are oppressed and dehumanized. They are tortured and treated like animals. For example, Fr. Gilbert kicks Toundi so often and strokes his ear as if he is a pet animal. All the blacks seem the same to the white men. Sophia says, We don't mean anything to them. All French Africans are assimilated and treated the same. This is the hypocrisy of the white French men. The Africans are humiliated. Father Gilbert gives Toundi old clothes. That is the way he is to him; just a thing to dump used and old things to him. Toundi and other Africans are humiliated and treated by the white men with no respect of human dignity. The French white men abuse Africans because of their color or because they are Africans. When the novel first introduces Father Vandermayer, we are told that he loves to beat the Christians who have committed adultery native Christians of course. He makes them undress in his office[8]. From this quote we can note that, the priest is firstly beating instead of forgiving, and secondly, he is being racist by only beating the natives that commit adultery. All these portray an African that is highly traumatized. It is worth noting that the "houseboys" as used in the text are actually not young boys. These are mature men who are taken in the care of the white men. Now imagine how traumatizing washing Madame's underwear meant to Toundi! It must have been so traumatizing. Christian hypocrisy is evident when Sophie the black mistress of a French engineer is keptaround only for the engineer's sexual pleasure, in fact the engineer hides Sophie from other white men. Hypocrisy shows itself when Toundi is warned by the engineer never to have a relationship with her. He hides his "sexual toy" Sophie from other French men yet jealous that she may have an affair with a black man. Sophie escape with some of engineers money that was intended to pay his workers to Spanish Guinea , in shame the engineer accuses Toundi of the action and is sent to prison. The fact that Sophie is treated as a cook every time white ladies are around is so dehumanizing and traumatizing. It makes her appear as less a human being. In prison Toundi is tortured into accepting the crime that he never did. He is celled in a hut neighboring the police headquarters; however, Toundi has a friend who works in the police station. His name is mendim, who in the description of other prisoners as the very masculine. Moreau orders that Toundi be beaten, not because he had sinned but because he knew of his affair with Madame. However, mendim pours blood on Toundi to simulate injury and spend the rest of the time playing cards. Soon after Toundi's sickness he is taken to a hospital but they had to wait for the black doctor since all the white had been promoted to captain. He is diagnosed ofa blocked rib, which he had incurred from a beating he received in the hands of the white man in prison. Moreau brings a white doctor and orders him to punish Toundi some more. The inhumane nature of the French colonial master toward its subject is revealed once again. When Toundi heard this, he also escapes to Spanish Guinea. It is because of colonialism that he is not safe in his home anymore.

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The Narrative Style and the Effects of Trauma in Houseboy

Much of the effects of trauma are revealed through the narrative style as detailed in Toundi's diary. The protagonist dies traumatically asking himself the question: brother, brother, what are we? What are we black men who are called French? The horrific scenarios at the prison camp and thevarious tortures that Africans are meant to go through while working at the whitemen's homesare so traumatizing. The commandant is just a bully and Toundi and other black boys live in perpetual fear and scare. Furthermore, the deep distress of Toundi's sister is a result of colonial trauma. She gets traumatized after seeing Toundi's back covered with blood after the arrest. More so, Sophie the mistress to the agricultural engineer suffers psychologically where she is called the cook by her lover. The torture drives her to the decision of disappearing with her lover's money box.

Whether Setting a Manifestation of a Stratified Society in the Novel Houseboy

The two societies that characterize Oyono's novel *Houseboy* are at crossroads. The French society lives in a luxury life full of outings at the expense of Africans who are forced to sit tree trunks while in the church service at Dangan. Furthermore, Gianopolis does not like natives. He likes to set his dogs on Africans who come around his European club. Another manifestation of social stratification is in Dangan where the European quarter and the African quarter are quite separate. In addition to the above, Africans are used to do all sorts of dirty work. Baklu the African servantis used to washing sanitary towels of the commandants wife at the residence. Africans do not receive enough care at the hospital. Those who get the chance to reach the veranda spend most of the day squeezing, jostling and sweating with disease in the absence of the doctor on some days, even Toundi's ill-timed death results from the absence of the white doctor who had the keys of the closed xray room. The most important display of European hypocrisy is in the relationship of the Commandant and his wife, referred to only as "Madame." The Madame, proclaimed as the most beautiful woman in the region wastes little time before she begins an affair with Monsieur Moreau, the director of Dangan's prison. At first, she hides her relationship. She is a Christian woman and the wife ofthe highest ranking official in the area. Soon though, she is overtaken, and begins seeing him almost daily, kissing him even in the open afternoon sun. When her thinly veiled secret is out, known seemingly to every African in town, rather than breaking off her relationship with the director, she becomes rancorous towards her servants, finding fault in all that they do and projecting her fallibilities onto them for their knowledge of her secret. Interestingly, her troubles do not begin until after an interesting encounter with Toundi. Though previously, the Madame paid him little to no attention– his heart broken as she gazed upon the garden and had forgotten he was there– things changed swiftly after their journey to the market. In response to the incessant cat calls the Madame received but did not understand during their trip, Toundi explained the locals' lust for her. "That is very nice of them," the Madame responds, but a flicker in her eyes reveals the transformation that has taken place. In Toundi's next passage,the Madame questions him about his job, and then subsequently his love life. While Toundi doesn't realize it, the Madame lusts for him, not as a man but as a lover; merely an object to satisfy herself with. "You only have to look at her eyes when she talks to you," Kalisia reveals later. Yet another white colonist wishes to own an African, both sexually and economically. It is no wonder the Madame turned to Moreau. "I'd say she couldn't do without a man for even a fortnight," Kalisia explains. "I thought of all the priests, all the pastors, all the white men, who come to save our souls and preach love of our neighbours. Is the white man's neighbour only other white men?" Toundi's sorrowful question speaks to the injustices of the French colonial policy of assimilation. In francophone Africa, the colonized were taught that by learning to speak, act, and believe like a Frenchman, they could indeed become French; as much a citizen as any man born beneath le Tour d'Eiffel. This policy was, in the end though, a bold faced lie. Whether the French believed their lie or not, neither their hearts nor their country would open to include their colonial subjects. No matter the rank, education, poise, or beauty of the Africans who wished to assimilate, they remained lower even than the most unsavory and downtrodden white Frenchman. No matter what an African could do, he was still black, and could never overcome the hurdle of acceptance into French culture. This widespread belief reveals the inherent racism underlying the entire imperial enterprise. It is prevalent throughout Oyono's novel. Even if Africans adopted European ideas and assimilated into their culture, they still could not be good enough. The one character that disagrees, Jacques Salvain, the headmaster of the school, makes a scene by comparing the lack of morals in Cameroon with the lack of morals in Paris. Even he takes a paternalistic stance though, encouraging Africans that they can be as good as Europeans, yet judging them by a European model of "good." The group of white colonists ask themselves fearful questions as they sit and contemplate the immigration of "natives" to Paris. "What would happen to civilization?" The French policy of assimilation can be called patronizing at its very best. Oyono's depicts the French treatment of Africans as if they were animals throughout the novel. Gilbert, as he throws his corn to the chickens; Toundi, as he felt like a parrot being lured by treats or even as the "Kingof the Dogs," the servant of the Commandant; always the Africans are emasculated and infantilized. "I am the thing that obeys," Toundi says, accepting his fate from a young age. If an African becomes a Frenchman, then, does he become un chein français? "Who are we blackmen who are called French?" The question echoes in my heart.

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CONCLUSION

The study found out that characterization is critical in revealing colonial trauma. This is illustrated by the agonizing Toundi on his deathbed. Other characters that are traumatized include Calisia, Sophie, and Toundi's sister. The narrative style was found out to be an important tool in the exposure of colonial trauma. The story starts in Spanish Guinea with a Frenchman on vacation, who finds a man named Toundi. He has been injured and soon dies. The Frenchman finds his diary, which is called an "exercise book" by Toundi. He is so traumatized that he vomits blood. He is in too much pain. The trauma is seen in his assertion that at least he is happy that he is dying far away from them; the Frenchmen. Based on this, the researcher recommends that further research should be conducted in the line of religion and its impact on the afflicted societies.

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