



The Heresy and Hypocrisy of the Church: A Marxist Analysis of Okezie Nwoka's God of Mercy

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ABSTRACT

Hypocrisy is found in various aspects of life, whether in religion, politics, or social parts. Hence, some of the church's hypocrisy is an outcome of different ups and downs in life. Starting with the problem in the novel, some of the hypocritical pastors engaged in an immense role in affecting the folk's lives because they persuaded people that God ordered them to do so. To accomplish their personal interests, the abusive monks disguise their verbal speech, smiles, and fine clothes like mild sheep to delusional followers, leaving them with guilt, shame, and spiritual scars. The present study aims to examine the hypocrisy and heresy of the church as portrayed in Okezie Nwoka's novel entitled God of Mercy. It reflects the source of corruption and heresy in some churches in a way that the corrupted priest adopts different brainwashing strategies to deceive their victims. Furthermore, the false priests are trying to force their doctrine on their cults. In the current study, the researcher relied on the Marxism theory to analyze the novel, the theory concentrates on Karl Marx's ideas of superstructure and base and how false religion can be used as a dangerous weapon by hypocrites and avid priests. The findings of the study revealed that hypocrisy and heresy were well portrayed in the Okezie Nwoka novel. It depicted how religion and priests do not always serve God's call. The author presented religion as a dangerous weapon and the victims reached their downfall by following a twisted offender. The fraud monks were pictured as caring only about themselves, their reputation, and their wealth. Also, they intended to follow false doctrine and quote unbiblical phrases to maintain their prosperity.

Keywords: Hypocrisy; Dispute; Heresy; Base and Superstructure; Spiritual and Physical Abuse.

INTRODUCTION

For Christianity, religion and faith are a way of salvation and a cleansing for their sins. People are questioning that if any religion calls for forgiveness and mercy, why hypocrisy is always there? In the Bible, "Jesus accused people of being hypocrites since they do the same things and prohibiting others from doing it" (Velarde, 2009). Starting with heresy which means any belief or action that "deviates from some standard, official belief. When religious authorities decide that belief is heretical, they usually make active efforts to eradicate the belief". So heresy is a problem for the church and Christianity since it reflects how some men of God deviate from the right path by manipulating and preaching others against the church's will. According to the church, the heresy is a "false teaching". When those false teachers start misleading believers about things that contrast with doctrine of the church, this is regarded as a problem of the church because that hypocrite will deny what the church calls for by deforming the church's image with their shattered and misleading ideas. In his book A Brief History of Heresy, Evans explains that there are two kinds of heresy people; those who follow God's orders and some modern priests who are "restrained by neither human nor divine reason".

Coming across (the great heresies) that the church has faced from the past till today; "The Arian, Albigensian, Protestant, and Modern" as Hilaire Belloc describe them in his book The Great Heresies. For the Arian, Jesus was merely a prophet, they did not believe in supernatural things, and they regarded him as an ordinary man like any other one. Meanwhile, Albigensian heresy believed in two different gods: one is good while the other is evil and bad. The God who created our souls is good, while the one who created our materialistic bodies is evil in addition

to that they did not believe in Jesus's resurrection after death. Reaching the Protestant heresy, this phase represented the civil wars between the catholic and protestant churches. Advancing to the modern heresy is regarded as a fierce battle against Christianity since the people are moving away from religion and this is a heresy by itself. These heresies are considered a great challenge to the Catholic Church to deal with. The church from the beginning spread its seeds of doctrines and everything beyond that is regarded as heresy.

The purpose of this study is to harness the Marxist theory with its concepts of base and superstructure in a way that depicts how the rich and powerful men who obtain authority can use the poor and easily deceived people for their own interest and by their manipulation they grow wealthier and stronger. So the false churches and priests as a superstructure are also sinners because they have the ultimate authority to manipulate the people's minds. Those false leaders (priests) have rules and legislation to control the base, characterized by the people, as political philosophers, who believe the church and its monks are parts of social institutions that consume the community's economics and wealth. As Karl Marx pointed out, "Religion is the opium of the masses," which means that religion has this rank of power that makes its people addicted to it (Cline, 2019, p. 1). He explains that "Religion is an expression of material realities and economic injustice", meaning that religion and church are part of each society. Still, it will become a disease when used by the wrong hands and for personal benefits. He also stated that oppressors "used religion to make people feel better about the distress they experience due to being poor and exploited" (Cline, 2019, p. 2). That is why he believed that religion gives the poor and oppressed people solutions in heaven rather than in the real world. Coming across the study gap, this article is the first one that deals with Okezie Nwoka *God of Mercy* and it will pave the way for other researchers to explore the study from a different scope. This paper will answer the following questions how are Karl Marx's ideas reflected in the events of the novel? Why did men in charge manipulate and use the lower class? How are the base and superstructure depicted in the characters? Do the neglected and poor people manage to survive? And how?

Starting with how Marx's explanation of false religion is depicted in *God of Mercy* (2021) by Okezie Nwoka, a lead teacher and writer who deals with African history and its costumes. Black mythologies and the power of the gods inspired Nwoka. *God of Mercy* is an embodiment of the allegiance to the gods. *God of Mercy* is set in Ichulu, an Igbo village where the people worship their gods as absolute. Their adherence to tradition has allowed them to evade the influences of colonialism and globalization. But the village is reckoning with changes, including a war between gods signaled by Ijeoma, a girl who can fly. The novel describes how the castaways and neglected people from their community were treated brutally by a hypocritical priest who forced them to neglect their religion, gods, and folklore by following him blindly, he colonized their souls and bodies when he pretended to be a messenger of God since he is a Christian and they are pagan. This exposes the hypocrisy of some religious men of God who are outwardly religious but internally are the opposite. *God of Mercy* also explores those who obtain a supernatural gift like (girl who can fly), and how they are punished and drafted away only because of these powers described by the priest as diabolic powers while he secretly wants to employ the powers for his materialistic benefits. The novel starts with a prologue to the following events and characteristics of each village. It has several chapters and titles for incidents like *A Girl Can Fly*, *Another Town*, *Mercy*, and an *Epilogue*. The events take place in two villages; one is called Igbo, and the other is Amalike (colonized village). The former tries to alter the traditions and beliefs of Igbo by using force. In Ichulu, people worship different gods and offer them sacrifices for approval. The prologue talks about these two villages in which the setting is fictional. It opens with a bad omen, news from Igbokwe, who can prophesy the approaching danger to the village (Ichulu).

Nwoka talks about manipulating the white ones who first came to this village. They are the devil in disguise because they tell the inhabitants of the village that they came to build churches and schools, but after a short time, their disguise falls, and "their friendship turned to enmity and their smiles converted to bullets" (Nwoka, 2021, p. 11).

There is an immense contrast between the two places; the first one, Ichulu, seemed centered in nature, tribal, and primitive one. This is reflected in their way of wearing clothes, hunting, speaking, and their rituals for gods to bless them. Their luck in life depended on worshipping various kinds of pagan gods. On the other hand, Amalike is a civilized city. They are Christian and have many churches. Their supreme reliance on the king and monks, taking their blessing on their properties and children from the churches.

Okezie Nwoka wrote his magical realistic novel to uncover the abusive behaviors of some false Christian priests toward children. *God of Mercy* is a revised work to Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. Retelling the message of Achebe, *God of Mercy* is a "well-turned dramatization of spiritual and social culture clashes: *Kirkus Reviews*" (Nwoka, 2021). In the novel, the religion and priest control everything in Amalike and lead their followers to the wrong paths. Religion, in the first place, should be used to liberate deprived souls and eliminate people's suffering by preaching and teaching them the right things. Whatever the false pastors say must be followed and implemented without questioning because they persuade people that God tells them what to do.

When people want to repent, they will turn to the churches to confess, but the opposite happens. The false priests will fill them with guilt and shame, leaving them with spiritual scars. Stewart Kabatebate, in *How to Identify False Teachers*, describes false prophets "as agents of the devil who disguise themselves as righteous people but yet they work against God and the Christian faith" (Kabatebate, 2020, p. 7).

Grounding on the fact that hypocrisy and heresy are very common topics in literature and several literary works impeded their views of religion in their work, hence it is an extremely important concept to be examined and analyzed. Besides, the researcher chooses Okezie Nwoka's *God of Mercy* to detect these two concepts, considering that the novel has not been studied before, on the one hand, and has not been analyzed in the aforementioned concepts. The significance of the present study lies in addressing paramount literary topics, analyzing new novels, and adding to the bulk of research in literature. Therefore, the current study aims to examine the concepts of hypocrisy and heresy in the novel *God of Mercy*. In addition, the study sheds light on the child's physical abuse by a hypocritical monk and how the children revolt against him to gain their freedom after they become grownups. Thus, the present study intends to answer the following question:

1. How the concepts of hypocrisy and heresy are portrayed in the novel *God of Mercy*?
2. How is the child's physical abuse pictured by a hypocritical monk?
3. How do the children revolt against the monk to gain their freedom?

Secondly, with the help of microscopes and scanners, the brick carving is analyzed, and the characteristics of the brick carving are summarized to facilitate the later induction. Finally, support for cultural and creative design.

LITERATURE REVIEW

God of Mercy (2021) is one of the postmodern novels that tackled fantasy, skepticism in religion, and traditions. This study has its originality since it is the first study that applied the Marxism theory to this novel by examining the exploitation of white upper-class pastors by the black proletariat victims. While writing and searching for this paper, many approximate articles about the subject era (but not about the novel) are examined and used. For example, Garrett explained how manipulating the church's members can damage people's lives. Reaching the reviews about the novel, Jaclyn Fulwood posting that *God of Mercy* tell the story of the clashing between tradition and altering, Christianity and paganism in the two villages Amalike and Ichulu. After several mischievous events in Ichulu, they believed that they were cursed by the Christian village which made them sacrifice Ijeoma to the priest to stop the curse (Fulwood, 2021).

METHODOLOGY

Research Method

The present study is qualitative in nature. The researcher analyzed the novel based on Marxism theory of Karl Marx's ideas of superstructure and base. Coming across the theory of Marxism is an approach that is built on the ideas of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels which depend on a materialistic point of view towards the world. *God of Mercy* is a novel by Okezie Nwoka in 2021. The writer makes his novel revolve around Nigerian folklore, by using "third-person narrative and the diary entries of a mysterious prisoner" (Nwoka, 2021). Nwoka portrays the resistance of the deprived people who are neglected by both their families and their gods. At the end of the novel, they manage to resist their oppressors till they gain their freedom. The novel was read from the beginning till the end and the researcher focused on examining the parts of the novel which tackled the hypocrisy and abusive behaviors of some religious priests. The study applied the Marxist theory by presenting the ideas of its theorists; Karl Marx and Frederic Engels. They define the base as "the economic structure of society at the given stage of development. Historical materialism states that there are various stages of social development and each stage has its own economic structure" (Monlisa, 2016). The base in the novel is represented by the lower-class inhabitants of Ichulu as well as the children who are imprisoned by the priest. They are controlled and affected by the rolling class of superstructure which is represented by the priest and the king of Amalike. Thus, the superstructure can be defined as "Above (the base), is built up a vast structure of philosophy, law, art, literature, religion, history and civilization. In Marx's language it is called the superstructure" (Monlisa, 2016).

The Research Material

The researcher analyzed Okezie Nwoka's *God of Mercy*, which is a magical realistic novel to uncover the abusive behaviors of false Christian priests toward children.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Hypocrisy of the Church

Hypocrisy is "A situation in which someone pretends to believe something that is the opposite of what they do or say at another time" (Hallman & Spiro, 2023). The hypocrisy is depicted in *Amalike* when a white pastor called Nwosu says prayers to church attendees every Sunday, standing in front of a fancy altar and asking his congregation to remain loyal to God and Jesus. He tells them that God will reward them if they follow his instructions: "Do you see the wonderful suit I am wearing? I imported from Dubai!" (Nwoka, 2021, p. 81). When the pastor lives a luxurious life, he warns them from indulging in sins like greed, chasing money and adultery. They mindlessly follow his instructions: "My brothers and sis, you must express your loyalty to God by being loyal to his messenger, the pastor" (Nwoka, 2021, p. 82). The superstructure represents the ideology, this means that they put the life rules and law concepts. The ideas of the pastors as a superstructure affect the commoner's ideas (base) and their way of thinking. This contrast is reflected in the previous study "Hypocrisy and moral seriousness". The researchers explore the idea of "the hypocrisy of pretence" when a character named Tartuffe pretends to be a pious man in order to gain respect and gifts from others in the church. His personality lacks this feature and this displays how some people who disguise themselves in holiness can be mere frauds.

According to Marx, religion as a superstructure will affect the mindset of people, especially the poor, since they live in poverty. Hence, the priest persuades his followers that what happens to them is due to their sins "and would preach rewards for God living only in another life" (Nwoka, 2021, p. 38).

He asks them to trust him since he is loyal to God, which means that he will "heal any sickness and lift any burden." During the ceremony, he explained, "If I, pastor innocent Nwosu, say that I can raise the dead in the name of Jesus, you must trust in me". This reflects how the pastor is self-conceited and a pretender (Nwoka, 2021, p. 81).

In the article, Davidson (2014, p. 135) denotes that the evil of humans is found within his own nature when hypocritical people who pretend to be God's believers are narcissists because they should move away from self-centered and care about others' "true converts manifest marks of love for God that do not spring solely from self-interest."

In *How to Identify False Teachers*, Kabatebate warns the people who follow false teachers that some of them are deceiving the true believers for material benefits like "selling of anointing oil and various objects for cash" (Kabatebate, 2020, p. 6). The Pastor portrays them by showing his ability to exorcize the evil spirits from children by performing a ritual of conjuring inside the church: "Anointing given to me by the blood of Jesus Christ, I will remove these evil spirits." "Amen!!" (Nwoka, 2021, p. 83). There are two kinds of fake prophets: "smooth talker and the miracle magician." The priests who pretend to have the ability to heal the ill are just like the magician who performs in front of the crowd. These kinds of priests can only forge the process of fraud healing in front of people inside the churches, but they cannot heal the sick indoors because they are pretenders, not natural healers (Kabatebate, 2020, p. 21).

Marx declares that people turned to religion because they became tired of their oppressors. Like the people in *Amalike*, whenever they need to escape their misery, they turn to the church as a catharsis from their sins and their desire to repent, believing that the monk will erase their distress. The priest's hypocrisy is evident when the messengers of God are supposed to be merciful, but Nwosu (*The Monk*) tortures the innocent children and locks them inside his church. One of his victims was a little girl. He alleges that she has been possessed for eleven years and nothing can help her, neither doctors nor medicine except the miracles of the Pastor. The child is terrified and refuses to go. However, her uncle drags her to the altar when the pastor puts his hand on her head and starts to mumble into the microphone "Descend upon this girl whom I have laid my hands on; I command the spirit possessing this girl to come out!" (Nwoka, 2021, p. 83). This dreadful treatment reflects Marx's opinion about religion; it is like the coexistence with suffering and needs more than "protest against it". The proletariat is absorbed in the ideas and instructions of the superstructure, just like those parents who are dragged by the priest and fetch their children to be purified from devils (Eggers, 2015). The girl is crying and shouting to leave her alone, but the Pastor cuts her hand with a digger and spits holy water on her while beating her with a stick, asking the devil to come out till she claims that the devil had left her body only to prevent the priest from beating her. After showing off his conjuring ability, the priest starts his sermons by telling the people that since they abandoned their God, the religion, and turned to liberation, they will be possessed like those children (Nwoka, 2021, p. 85). Jessica Isserow and Colin Klein give examples of what the traits of hypocrite priests are like; "pious priests who are secretly corrupt, homophobic senators whose private dalliances conflict with their explicit disavowals" (Isserow & Klein, 2017, p. 194).

One of the children (Ikemba) who was locked in the cell had a dark-skinned complexion; they said that he "seemed to be the most diabolical" among others (Nwoka, 2021, p. 85). The priest imprisoned him for about two years in the church pretending that he had an evil spirit inside him because his color was darker than charcoal. The abusive Pastor acts as if he is superior to the other race. This depicts the racial hypocrisy of the white race and the upper class who look down on black people and regard them as ignorant because of their "superstitious belief in witchcraft" (Kallin, 2008). Ikemba runs away several times and becomes troublesome which is why the pastor used to hit his hands; the boy screams; "This is my revolt! You stupid man! Is that the way of your God? Is that what your Bible tells you to do?" (Nwoka, 2021, p.89). Ikemba stands for the anarchists who are calling for equality not for private ownership while the priest represents himself as a God-like who owns the others (Sewell & Woods, 2015, p. 32). The monk does not follow God's instructions to be merciful to all kinds of people of their race. Like Satan, false monks distort the doctrine of God by "stuffing the skin of truth with a lie" (Kabatebate, 2020). After the fight, the monk orders his man to catch the boy and return him to the cell. Religion is used as a political instrument of exploitation by the one who has the authority. That is why Marx believed that the "religious consciousness" will despair from any society and will be replaced by fake attitudes toward personal benefits (Paulose, 2000). The children locked in cells are pale, and skinny with yellow eyes and teeth. They are moaning because of hunger: "Please, we are hungry, give us bread" (Nwoka, 2021, p. 89). Like the innocent children in William Blake's London, they are thin and starving with dark faces from the pollution of the city and the exploitation of their parents and religious men.

On the other hand, the pastor eats "rice and stew with goat meat" (Nwoka, 2021, p. 89). This shows how religion can be used for personal interests and how men of God and those with authority can hide under the cloak of religion. Beuer believed "religion was the illusory, distorted and deformed creation of man's consciousness divided against itself" (Clarkson, 1973).

Class Exploitation of Base by the Superstructure

The superstructure, refers to the various organizations like religion, politics, and social existence of man, meaning that "It is a mode of production at a particular stage of its development" (Williams, 1997, p. 32). There is a relationship between base and superstructure because "in the order of human society as established by God there are rulers and ruled, employers and employees, rich and poor, learned and ignorant, nobility and proletariat" (Miranda, 2004, p. 8). There must be a leader and a worker, a bourgeoisie and proletariat to create the mode of production. That is why the economic basis of each community is formed from the influence of the superstructure's ideas on the base. In the second village, Amalike, there are two kinds of classes: the upper class, which is represented by the fake priest and the king of Amalike, and the lower class, which is represented by the innocent children in the church and Amalike's inhabitants. There will always be a conflict between the bourgeoisie and anarchists: the first category concentrates on the state's power and its interests, while the other one calls for the abolition of this power and revolution.

Karl Marx and Engels, in their book Communist Manifesto, declare that people under capitalism are divided into two categories: the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. In the novel, the monk and king are wealthy, whereas the inhabitants of the villages and children are from a degrading class. With the increase in economics, the bourgeoisie grew richer in contrast to the working class, who lived in poverty and mass. Quoting from Pan Yue, "Everyone holding political power is bound to come into contact with religion (Marx & Engels, 1948, p. 1)

The priest works hand in hand with the king, plotting schemes against anyone who stands in their way. Both live in prosperity, the king wearing a gold necklace with a fancy vestment. Instead of donating to the poor and hungry people in his territory, the king gives millions to the priest each time he visits the church. Telling him that his works are prosperous within a short time that is because the priest tells him, "When one has faith, a donation to the church is an investment" (Nwoka, 2021, p. 91). The false prophets can twist the Bible in a way that serves their lavish lifestyle by "using psychological and coercive techniques to manipulate his followers to continue to donate money" (Kabatebate, 2020, p. 18). Each time the monk takes the money, he claims to use it to enlarge the house of God. Nevertheless, he uses the money for his interests, like buying classy clothes and a jeep.

Amalike is the opposite place from Ichulu. Amalike's people are Christian folk, while Ichulu's are heathen. Amalike is a place filled with wealthy white people who use cars; they represent culture and civilization, but on the contrary, people in Ichulu are primitive, uncultivated, and live in poverty. In Ichulu, a child was born as a mute girl called Ijeoma with the ability to fly. According to their superstitions, this girl is cursed by the gods: "Your daughter's abnormality is challenging the goddess" (Nwoka, 2021, p. 47). Anyone with such characteristics should be exiled into the evil forest and treated as an OSU, which means an enslaved person in their language. Also, there is a woman who gives birth to an infant with teeth, so they regard him as an OSU and banish him to the forest alive as a sacrifice for their goddess in order to suppress their anger because the child was an "Abomination to the goddess of the earth"(Nwoka, 2021, p. 45).

When the priest knew that Ijeoma could fly, he accused her of being a witch and dangerous creature. Thus, he sends his assistant, John to Ichulu to fetch the mute girl back to the church. Telling her father that the priest can cure her and "make her unable to fly again" (Nwoka, 2021, p. 150). Her father was thrilled since he regarded her as a cursed child. When the inhibitors of Amalike witness the flying ability of this girl, they start moving away from the church and seek her blessing instead of the priest. That is why the priest and the king conspired against her and locked her inside the cells with the other children. When she arrived, the monk said, "So this is the little girl stealing my folk from me" (Nwoka, 2021, p. 151). He starts forcing her into the English language, knowing that she cannot understand him, forcing her to erase her belief in Ichulu's gods and convert to Christianity. The pastor says, "In the name of Jesus, I will remove every demon ravaging your body so that you will grow into a God-fearing woman" (Nwoka, 2021, p. 153).

According to Allan Woods, society is divided into "exploiters and sub-exploiters," those who are in a higher rank in society and exploit minorities for the sake of their benefits (Sewell & Woods, 2015, p. 31). Like the monk, he exploited the child to show the others she is merely a sorceress. Inside the cells, the prisoners experience different kinds of torture. Some women specialize in beating and slapping the children's faces each day. The teachings of religion contradict what the Pastor's followers do in the church; they beat Ijeoma with a wooden stick as a kind of exorcism until her body was covered with bruises. Therefore, the priest and his workers are presented with the ultimate hypocrisy: "the failure to practice what one preaches" (Spiegel, 2020, p. 10).

The children are forced into work, starving and when they ask for more food, the dungeon keeper shouts that they should be thankful to the church since it pays for their food (Nwoka, 2021, p. 157). Marx paved the way to explain how the proletariat (children inside the church) are dehumanized and reduced to machines rather than human beings "their labor-power bought and sold as commodities on the market" (Worsley, 2002, p. 43). The state is represented by the power of the king and the monk who have controlled the masses and prevented them from seizing their rights. Marx argues that "class can be reduced neither to state nor to consciousness; it is rather an objective expression of the fact of exploitation" (Blackledge, 2014, p. 28).

Inside the church, the other children start taking Ijeoma as their model; they are delighted with her presence and feel sorry when she gets beaten. They rebel against the priest and his assistants and break their fear by speaking and shouting freely to the monk, "This big pastor is afraid of a small child! Are you afraid she can perform bigger miracles than you?" (Nwoka, 2021, p. 171). The pastor raged over the children's disobedience and started beating them with a metal stick and preparing a schedule to force them into learning a foreign language (English) which they did not understand to erase their personality as well as force them into hard work like cleaning and cooking. For him, the proletariat is regarded as an instrument of production. Kenneth J. Garrett's reading of the Gospel of Matthew figured that Jesus had warned people from following false pastors: "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing" (Garrett, 2017, p. 68). The priest's spiritual and physical abuse "may be driven by the naked love of wealth and material possessions" (Garrett, 2017, p. 52). The physical appearances of those false priests contrast with their inner desires because they use deception to lead the people to follow them without question. As a result, the harmed children, led by the mute girl and Ikemba (the colored boy) plan to escape from this prison and get their freedom. However, one of the children starts crying and makes the assistants aware of their plan. The Pastor caused them painful harm as a punishment for their escape. Each one is tied into a rope and forced to drink the acid. They start screaming and crying while the blood bursts out from their mouths (Nwoka, 2021, p. 185). The priest as an oppressor, exploits the proletariat and reduces them into objects, not human beings. Since the "class of modern wage laborers who, having no means of production of their own, are reduced to selling their labor power in order to live" (Marx & Engels, 1948, p. 68). According to Marx, "different social classes in history have competed to gain control over the surplus of their common labor; 'Capitalist against worker'" (Raines, 2002, p. 3).

He also illustrates that the battle between the bourgeoisie (priest) and the proletariat (children) either end "in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes" (Raines, 2002, p. 68). Ijeoma stayed locked in the church for nine years, and she started using English as her language of communication and reading the bible. "For nine years, she was persuaded to become a Christian, and for nine years, she secretly dismissed Christianity" (Nwoka, 2021, p. 204).

As a kind of escapism, the mute girl starts writing a diary and beseeching her gods to save her from torment. Ijeoma writes that each day, a car comes at night to the church and takes some of the children away without knowing their destination (Nwoka, 2021, p. 155). It turns out that the king and the Pastor are participating in illegal business, like selling those forgotten children for the sake of their organs. In return, they will have enormous sums of money from the member dealers. The king and priest consider his prisoners as commodities and useless creatures, exploiting them for the sake of their interests. For Marx, humanity is more important than religion; he is "bringing divinity down to earth and raising humanity to the level of divine" (Paulose, 2000). This

hypocritical priest is stripped of any humanity and sense of mercy towards his followers.

Furthermore, that is why Marx argued that "religion is, at the same time, the expression of real economic distress and the protest against real distress" (Juhansar, 2011). When the priest knows that Ijeoma can fly, he thinks of a profitable plan when she becomes a woman. One day, he asks John (his assistant and the king's nephew) to molest and rape Ijeoma to be pregnant with a white flying child so that they can sell them for millions (Nwoka, 2021, p. 214). The king uses the church as a valuable tool to control people inside and outside his region, and this is obvious when Engels illustrated that "the ruling classes may wish to employ religious belief and feelings as forces for the retention of their power" (Paulose, 2000). People should not trust the disingenuous priests unquestioningly because not all men of God are innocent; some adopt a strategy of brainwashing to deceive their members and try to force their doctrine on their cults.

John could not do such a thing, so he told her about the king and the priest's scheme and asked her to wrap her dairies around her belly to look like she was pregnant instead of being a victim of physical abuse. Ijeoma is terrified of what she hears and starts begging her God, Chukwu, to save her, and she tries to commit suicide by twisting her clothes around her neck. The victim of psychological abuse from the church must deal with a long and frustrating path of healing. Like the children locked and tortured inside the church's cells, they will be traumatized by behavioral and physical abuse. They will not trust others easily again, and their character wavers because these abusive actions will leave a self-scar within the victims (Garrett, 2017).

The moment she tries to end her life, Ikemba saves her and executes his plan of running away from this hellish prison with the other inmates. At night, he opens the cells and lets everyone run with him: "A woman of integrity, who had given me a set of keys, gasoline, and matches" (Nwoka, 2021, p. 234). He sets the whole church on fire, and Ijeoma takes them and flees away to the evil forest where all the Osu and outcasts are. In the end, when the inhabitants of Ichulu heard the news, they rushed to the evil forest to greet Ijeoma and the Osu to admit their regret and ask for forgiveness. In sum, Ijeoma stands for the God of mercy which means when gods stop hearing people's prayers, people themselves become gods who seize their freedom and happiness themselves because the men of God increased the distress and wretchedness of oppressed people by "the legalization of religion".

CONCLUSION

Okezie Nwoka sheds light on fiction to depict how religion and priests do not always serve God's call. In the novel, he presents religion as a dangerous weapon when it is used by hypocrites and manipulative monks. God of Mercy embodies how the victims will reach their downfall by following a twisted offender. When the fraud monks care only about themselves, their reputation, and their wealth by preaching to their blind followers with false doctrine and quoting unbiblical phrases to maintain their prosperity. The men of religion should be characterized with a sense of morality in order to lead the people to their salvation, and this trait contrasts with the hypocritical men of God. The current study scrutinizes the novel from a Marxist point of view when the theory revolves around the materialist and bourgeois class dominating and controlling the market and society. Similar to the novel, the superstructure which represented by the king and fake priest who are playing the role of God and control the base as their puppets. After applying the ideas of Marx in the text by using the previous studies to enhance the present study, the findings of the study presented that when power and authority are used by the wrong and hypocritical people, the entourage will be degraded and their rights will be taken away. Also, the study illustrates the external and internal intentions of those who pretend to be pious while in reality, they are merely hypocrite who seek their own material benefits. That is why the believers must be acknowledged that their mercy will be obtained only from God himself not from any other worldly human source.

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ETHICAL DECLARATION

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