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Didacticism and the Third Generation of African Writers: Chukwuma Ibezute's *The Temporal Gods* and *Goddess in the Cathedral*

Didacticism and the Third Generation of African Writers

This article argues that African literature is a didactic literature. It points out that even though African literature has borrowed so much from European literary culture, especially in the areas of form and language; didacticism is not one of those concepts that African literature inherited from the European literary culture. By didacticism, it is implied that African literature is aimed at correcting, informing and educating its readers. These functions of didacticism are inherent in African oral traditional storytelling and are carried over to the written literature. It is further argued in the article that of the three generations that now make up African literature, the third generation of African writers are accused of not making their stories didactic and that only a selected few of them remain true to making their stories didactic. Among these few writers is Chukwuma Ibezute. Using Chukwuma Ibezute's two novels, *The Temporal Gods* (1998) and *Goddess in the Cathedral* (2003) the didactic nature of African literature as contained in the works of a writer of the third generation is demonstrated. In *The Temporal Gods* the reality of the consequences of greed and envy are revealed. It is further argued through the novel that the afflictions of evil spirits on their victims are temporal. In *Goddess in the Cathedral* we are presented with another educating story of the activities of evil spirits and their agents. Through the novel, we are warned against some pastors who are agents of evil spirits but who claim to be working for the almighty God. Using examples from the two novels, ways on how to know a pastor who is working for God and the one who is working for evil spirits are further revealed. **Keywords:** African literature, Generations, Chukwuma Ibezute, didacticism, oral storytelling.

Introduction

One of the most fascinating debates over the years in the criticism of African literature is the argument that it is a literature of didacticism. This is because, like Chinese literature and some indigenous Indian literatures, African literature aims at informing and correcting some of the ills facing the African society. Even though African literature has been said to have borrowed so much from European literary culture, especially in the areas of form and language; didacticism cannot be said to be one of those concepts that African literature inherited from the European literary culture. It is important to note, therefore, that didacticism in African literature is rather a concept that has its root in African oral tradition and is employed in the written African literature. Francis E. Ngwaba's assertion in his essay "The English Novel and the Novel in English: Points of Contact and Departure" further explains the point of departure between the

forms which the African literature borrowed from the European literary culture and the ones the African literature picked from the African oral tradition:

Most western critics accused African writers of too great a preoccupation with a social message at the expense of drawing convincing portraits of real human figures. African critics in reply argued that traditional African ways of life are clearly different from European ways that an African writer needs to domesticate the novel culturally so as to convey African concepts of man and the universe while at the same time exploring the thematic issues which ignite his creative sensibility. (Ngwaba 6)

This idea of “domesticating” literature, as Ngwaba would rather say it, is what creates the aura of African in the writings of writers from African soil. Without this the literature could as well be termed European literature—since the form and the language of most African literature are European. If this is to happen, the arguments of the different European scholars that Africa has no literature prior to the advent of its colonialism—an argument that many of African scholars have made different frantic efforts to debunk in their literatures and essays—would hold sway. With the “domestication” of our literature, the value of the African oral tradition is hence evoked. The question here is: How has the African writer been domesticating his literature? Pius Olusegun Dada attempted to answer this question in his essay, when he writes that the African writer employs African oral traditional form in his writing—which, as a matter of fact, includes didacticism. This is because when a story is to be told in a traditional African society, a lot of traditional African oral “ingredients”, such as proverbs, songs, symbols etc., come to play but these are not usually left loose as individual concepts; they are usually tied together with another of African oral form, didacticism.

This does not in any way place the concept of didacticism above the story itself; it only helps to emphasize the importance of storytelling and helps to make it a tool for socio change and development because as Chris Ngozi Nkoro rightly observes, it is “the drive to make a literary work of art grow from social experience” that “literature offers itself as an ally of society” (68). In African traditional society, it is not heard of that stories devoured of lessons are told. Little wonder, they are usually told by adults while the children listen. Stories are told to either teach or inform or educate children, and sometimes adults, on some of the values of the society. This is, most times, done through either using animal characters together with rural symbols or through using human characters together with rural symbols—symbols that would spur questions from the audience as to why they were used and really get them thinking. And usually, at the end of the story, the storyteller or even a member of the audience, in order that the lessons in the story may be made known, makes one or two statements as it concerns the lessons that are learnt from the story. Now in its written form, this is what African literature seems to be doing.

As Michel Foucault would say, the artist is something of a maintained deviant who expects to live by society without being a parasite on it. In his attempts at domesticating his literature, African writer now seems to nose around for what is going out of hand in the society and when he/she finds one, he/she then recreates it in the form of a story—with some solutions in-view. This is the reason, in his book *The Colonial Experience and African Literature* (2003), Chris Osuafor describes African literature as a functional literature. According to him, African literature “must speak of a particular place, evolve out of the necessities of its history, past and current, and the aspiration and destiny of its people” (21). To Okonkwo in his essay entitled “The African Writer as a Teacher,” the African writer imbues his work with themes that addresses socio-political and economic exigencies of the African society. The African writer confers relevance and truth on his/her work by sourcing data from an authentic African experience and also makes teaching Africans “the meaning of colonialism (whether it is internal or external)” the major concern of his writing (78). Writing on the functionality of African writer and his literature, Wole Soyinka asserts that “the exercise of the literary function may serve the writer-and-followers to keep in view what the ends of humanity are. They may eventually be spurred to action in defense of those ends” (qtd in Osuafor, 21). In his own essay, Ezejideaku reiterates the similar views expressed by these scholars thus, “when the writer ceases to function as the conscience of his society, his relevance to that society comes seriously into question. Thus, the writer must call into use all resources available to him, not only to sensitize his community but also to proffer to them ways by which they can make their overall conditions better” (48).

However, this view has been earlier associated with Achebe, when he refers to African writing as a socially conscious art and equates the role of the writer with that of a teacher in his book of essays entitled *Morning Yet on Creation Day* (1975). According to him, artistic fidelity in an African writer lies in his ability to recreate an authentic African experience (with all its imperfections) in the social, cultural and political spheres. He argues that African writer has the sacred duty to help the African society regain faith in itself and to recover from the traumatic effects of colonial subjugation and slavery; to re-educate and regenerate his people into putting away “the complexes of the years of denigration and self-abasement” (38). Since it is a common knowledge that teachers design society’s attitude, ideas, hopes and aspirations, African writer as a teacher cannot be excused from the task of re-educating and regenerating African values. This is also the reason why Ngũgĩ writes that the African writer not only represents social ills but also seeks “out the sources, the causes and the trends of a revolutionary struggle which has already destroyed the traditional power—map drawn by the colonialist nations” (65-6).

Though it seems it is not all African writers pattern their works to carry the burden of African experience in the manner that these African scholars have explained. Some

African writers, over the years, would rather depict the travails of the society in their works and leave them at that—without including in their stories some likely solutions to the problems that are captured. This does not mean that any writer who only reproduces the ills of his society is a bad writer of African literature—because even sometimes in African traditional society, stories can be told in this manner, in order to challenge the audience to brainstorm on the reason for such story and to provoke them to fathom the possible solutions to the societal problems raised in the story. This does not also mean that a story told in this manner is not didactic. Didacticism takes different forms and can easily be contained in a story irrespective of the nature of problem the writer aims at correcting through his story and irrespective of the kind of European form the writer imports to tell his story. The problem is that some writers just decide to ignore this part of African literary form. This then brings us to another interesting debate that has been going round the African literary terrain—that the African writers of the postmodern generation¹ are the more accomplished “practitioners” of this vice of not seeking out didacticism in their stories. In his essay entitled “The Contemporary Nigerian Fiction”, Nnolim points out that it is in seeking out didacticism in their storytelling that is the point of divergence between the writers of the modern generation, the writers of the ideological generation and the writers of the postmodern generation. According to him, unlike the other two generations of African writers, the writers of the postmodern generation “lack a clearly defined thematic focus. If anything, they have depicted a people adrift, hedonistic, cowed finally by the long incursion of the military in the body politic” (229).

For instance, most works written in the modern generation seem to be teaching and educating their readers about African life and culture and challenging the European scholars and critics that had argued that African people are not capable of thinking hence they cannot produce literature. In explaining Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* (a writer of the modern generation), Killam and Kerfoot say, “Achebe uses the story of the novel’s hero, Okonkwo, to demonstrate how British colonial Christianity destroyed traditional Igbo society in Eastern Nigeria at the turn of the twentieth century. The steadfastness of the religious beliefs of the Igbo community are represented in Okonkwo, who stays true to his culture’s values and is killed as a result” (297). The works of the writers of ideological generation seem to be committed to the argument that most of the ideologies which the Europeans claim to have originated were not totally alien to Africans prior to the advent of colonialism. For example, in explaining Festus Iyayi’s *Violence* (a writer of the ideological generation), Oguzie posits that “the post-civil-war Nigerian writing has witnessed shifting trends in themes; thus justifying Achebe’s contention that an African creative writer who tries to avoid the big social and political issues of contemporary Africa society will end up being completely irrelevant” (247). In his same essay, therefore, Nnolim says, one cannot attribute a clearly defined literary engagement to the African writers of

the postmodern generation. The reason for this is linked to the background of the majority of the writers of this generation. They are said to have come from a background that exposes them to European forms over the African ones and that promotes these forms to the detriment of the African ones. Hence, as they begin to write, they seek after European literary models which they are more conversant with and then jettison African literary forms and models that they are called to build. It is only a few of them, who might have had rural upbringing that have continued on this tradition of making their stories didactic and have succeeded in closing the gap that time brings by bending their literature to carry the burden of the experience of their immediate generation. Among such writers of the postmodern generation is Chukwuma Ibezute.

In his novels, *The Temporal Gods* and *Goddess in the Cathedral*, Chukwuma Ibezute seems to have employed what we earlier referred to as the “ingredients” of African folklore—proverbs, and the rest of others. One other fascinating thing about the two novels is that the stories and all the “ingredients” with which they were created are made whole through the use of didacticism. The sense in which we regard the two novels as didactic may be slightly different from the popular meaning of the term. This is because, for instance, what an European critic may call “realism”—a literary ideology popularized by the French writer, Emile Zola, in his essay, “The Experimental Novel”—an African critic may see as didactic. In African traditional society, there is no concept as realism (or naturalism—a concept which is developed from realism—or any other); a story can only be didactic or would not be regarded as story (Chinweizu, Jemie & Madubuike 246). When Pooley et al. say that realism is “the tendency to emphasize the limitations that real life imposes on humanity, and to show how those limitations affect life” (788), for instance, we are convinced that African traditional stories, from where the written ones take their lives, are also about the “limitations that real life imposes on humanity”—even though there could have been no defined terms for them. It is the same with the fact that the English language does not have terms to describe some concepts in African traditional literature.

Before now some African scholars are already looking for a way of transmuting some of the terms that could best explain some concepts in African traditional oral stories which are not in the conventional form. In a recent study, it has been disclosed that the African concept of didacticism is all encompassing (Akporobaro 21). This is because they are of the view that African stories would have nothing to teach, educate or inform the reader if the stories do not pick from the realities of the African society or if it does not draw from its environment. This is what even Ibezute’s novels have demonstrated. Like most writers of the generations before his, who have anchored their stories on African society, Ibezute through the use of a narrator who is kin on capturing life in its totality, paints the true picture of a contemporary African society where everything is not just rosy: A society where good exists with bad; where bad triumphs over good most of the time and good manages to triumph over bad by the

grace of God. In his novel *The Temporal Gods*, the narrator deconstructs the popular fantasy, which we can even see in John Hagee's statements, that "True love doesn't have a happy ending; true love doesn't have an ending." (86) and that "Every marriage is an effort to find love" (85)—instead, the narrator seems to be saying that life and marriage are not geared towards finding love but towards finding individual gain.

In the novel, we are made to contemplate the reality that is in the extent a woman can go to maintain her position as the only wife. In the attempt to capture Akudi in the struggle to maintain her position as the only wife of George Okonta, the novel is divided into two parts while the women characters in the novel are also divided into two kinds. The first part of the novel is about how Akudi tries to frustrate her husband's effort to take a second wife. The second part is about how Akudi tries to frustrate Ogonna, the son of her co-wife, in order that her own son might be more successful than him. On the other hand, through the women characters in the novel, an impression is created in us that women are the brains behind every problem that threatens most polygamous homes and secondly, they are also the victims of the rivalry that polygamy brings. The division of women characters in the novel into two kinds can however be said to make up what constitutes the first part of the novel. It is important that we begin by looking at how the narrator succeeds in dividing the women characters into two kinds—starting with the character of Akudi. What first confronts us, as we read the novel, is the fact of the story that a woman would always behave like her mother; a bad woman would take after her mother's badness and a good woman would take after her mother's goodness:

With her fine features which included a beautiful face and bouncing hips when she walked, George had told his people that if he failed to marry her, nobody should ever talk to him about marriage. Other members of George Okonta's family who disagreed with George over his marriage with Akudi were of the opinion that Akudi was not only older than George but might behave like her mother. They had told the young man not to ignore the belief among the people that female children took more of their attitude from their mothers. In this regard, they argued:

"Anybody who wishes to have a good wife and sees a girl he loves to marry should first of all ascertain the girl's mother's way of life."

Truly, Akudi's mother was notorious for her constant engagement of the services of great medicine men and hostility to her husband. (16)

We are made to realise that such a woman could be peaceful and good at the time of marriage but would definitely turn to do the things she once saw her mother do at the long run. So it is what happened immediately Akudi's husband, George, chose to marry more wives. The novel seems to suggest that a woman can only be adjudged to be good and peaceful when she finds herself married to a man with other wives and still conducts herself in a peaceful and good manner. Using the character of Akudi

Okonta, the novel demonstrates how a good, loving and understanding wife could turn into a villain, all in a bit to defend her position as the only wife: "Before he became a polygamist, George Okonta had lived with Akudi his wife for eight years without a child. They loved each other and did things together, with love and understanding. It was rare to see one of them having a meal without the other." (2)

Akudi though had been an understanding wife; she refused to understand when her husband, George Okonta, decided to marry another wife because of their inability to bear children after several years. This calls to mind the fact that it is not only for the sake of love and companionship that the African man marries, it is also for the sake of children. This position recalls the proverb of the Igbo society, *ma o boghi maka nwa, gini ka mmadu choga na otele mmadu ibe ya* (If it is not for children, what does a human being seek in the bosom of his fellow human being). The novel capitalizes on the complication that results from George Okonta's resolve to have children through other women since his wife cannot give him children and later on Akudi's insistence that "she still had the hope to bear children" (2). The novel is actually about how George Okonta and Akudi Okonta struggle to hold onto their individual stands till the end. While George Okonta went ahead to marry even when his beloved wife said no, Akudi also went ahead to fight to truncate her husband's resolve to have other wives. In the novel, George Okonta proved himself the head of the family by pressing his decision on his wife, Akudi. Akudi, on the other hand, resisted her husband's decision through secretly involving herself in the use of charms. Since the story is set in an imaginary Igbo society of "Abanja village by the creek of the River Niger," and since among the Igbo people, it is a man who makes decisions for his family, the novel leaves the reader with the impression that Akudi should have accepted her husband's decision. But if Akudi had accepted her husband's decision, there would not have been this story. There came to be this story because Akudi refused her husband's decision and fought against it. This goes a long way to prove Northrop Frye's assertion, especially when he says, creative material, "like the poet, is born and not made" (506)—hence, so we can say of the novel and the circumstance that surround Akudi as a character.

In the novel a situation is created where the plans of George Okonta worked, even though there were initial attempts by Akudi to truncate it. With Akudi's initial attempt to make sure that her husband did not marry another woman, her helplessness is revealed and this shows up her resistance in two stages. The first stage is the stage of tricks. The second stage is that of charms. In her first stage, Akudi resolves to steal from her own husband. However, this did not yield needed result. Having stolen the money with which her husband planned to marry another woman and having made it look as if the house was invaded by thieves, she had returned to the farm and pretended as if she did not know anything about how the money got missing. When she noticed that her husband was convinced that she was behind the missing money

and as a matter of fact had threatened to send her packing, she decided to achieve her plan another way. This brings us to the second stage where she finds for herself a native doctor who helped her achieve her plan half way. In this stage, Akudi became the source of George Okonta and her fellow wives miseries. In this stage, through the help of the native doctor, she succeeded in putting George Okonta through the misery of not having his other wives bear him children: The same reason he ventured into polygamy. She also made sure Nwaku and Adaeze, her co-wives suffered the pains of not bearing children for their husband and later succeeded in frustrating them out of George Okonta's house. This is evident in the story:

Among these women, Nwaku and Adaeze who did not have any child for him were never known to have participated in, or taken sides with anybody in the quarrels which cropped up at random in the family. They lived with George for only a few years and after a severe quarrel one day between two of them and Akudi who referred to them as men, the two women left George Okonta for their own good. It was later known that they married two different non-polygamists and were wedded in their churches. Nwaku was said to be [the] happy mother of three children while Adaeze bore four children for her husband. The two women maintained [a] good relationship and once in a while when they met, they dramatized and cracked jokes about their experiences at the house of George Okonta. (18)

Here, the novel reveals a salient thing about African women who find themselves in this kind of situation. An African woman is only bold in her husband's house when she is able to bear him children. We see this first with the relationship between Akudi and George at the beginning of the novel. After several years of childlessness, Akudi could not press George to marry her in the church as he initially promised because of the guilt that she had been unable to bear him a child. This scenario is also repeated with Nwaku and Adaeze. They were unable to freely participate in any important conversation in the family. Talking about their inability to participate in the family matters, the narrator observes: "Their behaviour of quietness and non-participation in family matters then portrayed them as believing that in a polygamous home, any woman who has no child has no ground or base" (18).

It is when Akudi now became the mother of "a boy named Nwokeji and a daughter" that she regained her lost voice. With her regained voice, she perpetrated more evil on the last wife who is fortunate to bear children for George despite Akudi's plan, through the native doctor's charm, that none of George's wives would bear him children. This is also to prove that charms do not work on everybody. Nwakego represents the few people who defile the charm that has caused havoc and have resulted in the death of many people. The charm that had effect on Nwaku and Adaeze did not work on her. When Akudi tormented her son, Ogonna, she could not do anything to her. The narrator, though did not tell us why Akudi's charm did not

work on Nwakego. Instead he says “it was not known why she decided to leave Nwakego, the fourth and last wife of her husband out of the vendetta” (11). With this statement however, the narrator does not mean that Akudi left Nwakego because she decided to play down on her plan to frustrate the plan of her husband, George. The narrator’s use of such expression is aimed at revealing or sharing in the people’s view. Akudi, who has earlier vowed “that any new wife brought in by her husband would not get pregnant let alone bearing children” (10), would not have changed her decision on seeing Nwakego being married into the family of George Okonta. This is evident in Akudi’s later efforts to frustrate Ogonna which however leads us to the second part of the novel. The second part of the novel is enshrined in irony. Akudi, who was so keen on how to make sure her son became the head in everything, lose out. Though the narrator creates a situation where Akudi succeeded in having her own son become the “first son” of George Okonta, her son only remained a ceremonial “first son—while Nwakego’s son, Ogonna, became the bread winner of the family and eventually took care of Nwokeji when her mother, Akudi, was no more present to wreak havoc.

Central in the second part of the novel is the struggle between good and evil spirit forces. When Ogonna returned home one Christmas, a successful man, with a “motorcycle and plenty of money” (64) and was caged spiritually, it was Nwakego, through the help of a friend, who sought for the help of a spiritualist that eventually helped to free Ogonna from Akudi’s spiritual cage. Using the character of Ije Odum, in the novel, the narrator seems to want us to believe that in the course of their evil charm preparations, native doctors usually try to exonerate themselves—Perhaps, to free themselves from its karma.

The narrator later makes us to realize that that does not still make them good personalities. In order to prove this, he sees to it that Ije Odum, who thought he would not die, dies shamefully at the mockery of all and sundry and Akudi who believed in Ije Odum’s charm got missing. This reaffirms the Biblical saying that the righteous will be exalted, while the wicked will fall into his very pit. The narrator presents Nwakego as a very good wife; an exact contrast to Akudi. She did not know the way to a native doctor’s house. It was on the direction of one of her friends that she went seeking the assistance of a native doctor. When Akudi stuck Ogonna the second time with her secret charm and succeeded in caging him again, Nwakego went back in search of the native doctor she once visited but was disappointed when she was told that the native doctor had become a born-again Christian. Unlike Akudi who would have gone in search of another native doctor, Nwakego resigned to fate and left everything in the hands of God. However, God did not abandon Nwakego and her son Ogonna—he answered them in his own time. Hence, acknowledging the statement contained in the notice written and posted on the door of the native doctor who became a born-again, “THE POWERS OF IDOLS ARE TEMPORAL WHILE THOSE OF GOD ARE EVERLASTING” (106).

As if this statement contained in the notice also pertained to Ibezute's *Goddess in the Cathedral*, we were taken through another mind bugging story of the activities of some spirit beings and their agents. Like Ibezute's *The Temporal Gods* whose theme is summarized on the message posted on the door of the native doctor who became born-again, his *Goddess in the Cathedral* seems to be written with the same theme in mind. Unlike in *The Temporal Gods* where God intervened, through Pastor Duke, and ended the suffering of Ogonna and brought peace and happiness to his mother Nwakago, in *Goddess in the Cathedral* the narrator presents us with different kinds of spiritual activities. Through the novel (*Goddess in the Cathedral*) it is revealed that God intervenes only when the people under spiritual oppression are upright and when they are directly or indirectly not involved in spiritual wickedness. This could be the reason the narrator did not bother to make Mary-Ann's husband, Jamie Boha, go in seek of the services of a pastor as one would expect of a character in a contemporary African story. This also depicts the narrator's awareness of the fact that some communities in contemporary African society still believe in traditional worship, hence Jamie Boha went in search of the monstrous native doctor who lived in the forest to deliver them from the menace of the ghost of Mary-Ann. It is also through delivering the entire community of Mary-Ann's menace that Jehan Victor Boha was delivered from his spiritual bondage.

It is important to point out also that because of the structure and style of *Goddess in the Cathedral* it is difficult to decide who the protagonist of the novel is. This is because the novel seems to actually pertain to the life and characters of Mary-Ann and her foster son, Jehan Victor Boha. As we all know, it is problematic to identify two different developed characters in a novel as the protagonists, especially when both are mother and child. The one thing that helped in determining the protagonist of the novel is the fact that one is presented to be good and the other is made to play a villain. We decided on Jehan Victor Boha as the protagonist because of his innocence and his travails in the society of the novel. Aside that, we would have, as well, say that Mary-Ann is the protagonist because the story is about her life and her role in the upbringing of her foster son, Jehan Victor Boha. The fact that Mary-Ann had to die while Jehan Victor Boha continued to live and to run the affairs of the church after her death, would not have matter so much because even at her death she remained powerful and active.

Using the character of Jehan Victor Boha, the narrator makes us to contemplate life in Africa as one determined and controlled by the spirits. It seems the novel aims at saying that in Africa it is not how much a man struggles; it is how much the spirits allow one to prosper. It is not all about what one wants to do; it is all about what the spirits want one to do. Though as we have said before and as we have seen in *The Temporal Gods*, the manipulations and controls over one's destiny and life by these spirits could only be temporal. This is evident in the story where having forced Jehan

Victor Boha out of the university where he worked as a scholar with the help of her queen mother, Mary-Ann told him to open a church. This is not because Jehan Victor Boha was not doing well as a scholar; contrary to that speculation, Jehan was “performing creditably in his career” and in fact “had bought his personal car” (68) while working in the university. Mary-Ann only wanted him to become a pastor in order to fulfil the demands of her spiritual kingdom. The demands of her spiritual kingdom are evident in the novel, thus:

One night, Mary-Ann while asleep, went to their usual marine meeting. At the meeting, the marine Queen crowned Mary-Ann the Goddess of the Earth, and instructed her to build a church from where they would be having human blood, flesh and soul, at will. Mary-Ann accepted with joy the crown of Goddess of the Earth. But she suggested to the Queen that building a church where people would be dying at random won't benefit the marine authority. She argued that the church would close-down the moment people observed constant deaths among the congregation. Marine Queen laughed. She told Mary-Ann not to worry because the marine spirits know the system with which to hurt people and turn round to soothe them. It wouldn't be instantaneous and constant deaths of people per se. Any man or woman needed could be going about his normal business but his mind and sense of reasoning would be made use of. Then, out of about one thousand seven hundred and fifty members, dangle a carrot of wealthiness to ten members. Even if it happened to be that thirty percent of what would have been the total success of all the members were given out to the ten, thirty percent distributed to a few among the remaining members, while the balance of forty percent went to the marine, the less successful ones would see the church as an epitome of hope for the people in difficulty and invite their brothers, sisters and friends. (68)

It was not, however, easy for Mary-Ann to come by this. Having noticed that persuasion alone would not make Jehan Boha, who was at that time an Associate Professor at Odigan State University, change his mind, she reported back to the Queen of the marines but pleaded that “under no circumstance should the life” of Jehan be tampered with. And “the Queen assured Mary-Ann that nothing bad would ever happen to Jehan, but she knew how to whip an erring son into line” (71). According to the novel, it was not long, “Jehan was accused of backing cultists at Odigan State University and was dismissed with ignominy from his job” (71). Jehan Boha least expected that and still refused to succumb to his foster mother's lure to start a church. “After a few months in fruitless search for a new job”, “he resorted to the use of his car as taxi at Port Harcourt” (71). It was in the course of his taxi driving that one “afternoon”, he “suddenly went into a trance”. In the trance, “he saw himself in a big cathedral with a multitude of adherents” and he was busy “preaching as the officiating minister” (72). When he narrated his experience to his foster mother, Mary-Ann, she “said it was

a manifestation of God's call and signs of hope and wonders" (72). Through the novel, the narrator seems to be saying that most pastors, who claim to have been called into ministry, may not have been called by Almighty God—it is possible that they are called by some evil spirits under the cloak of the Almighty God. Of course, the Bible has prophesied this before now, especially where it is written:

Now concerning the coming of our lord Jesus Christ and our assembling to meet him, we beg you, brethren, not to be quickly shaken in mind or excited, either by spirit or by word, or by letter purporting to be from us, to the effect that the day of the lord has come. Let no one deceive you in any way; for that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. (2 Thessalonians 2–5)

In accordance with the demands of the queen mother of the marine world, the church is opened at Port Harcourt with the name: "Lonely Path to the River of Greatness Church". Jehan Victor Boha became the officiating pastor and he was now being referred to as Reverend Prophet Jehan Boha. The population of the church increased at an unprecedented rate because the miracles, signs and wonders "never witnessed since after the days of Jesus Christ of Nazareth's ministry on earth were randomly testified to by adherents" (95). However, the Bible has already made it known that "the lawless one's presence is according to the operation of Satan with every powerful work and lying signs and portents" (2 Thessalonians 9). These miracles, signs and wonders are without their bad sides. For example, "those who went to the church for wealth had it in abundance" but "road side gossips said many promising youths around them became useless and rolling stones". While "those who went for fruit of the womb had many children, though it was said that most of the children never grew to be somebody. Some died before the age of ten, while many others grew up to be imbeciles" (95).

The novel, *Goddess in the Cathedral* presents to us a protagonist, who unlike the characters of Ibezute's other novels, is a victim of life. From the beginning of the novel to its end, Jehan proves to be a character who suffered greatly in the hands of spirits and spiritual human beings. Though the narrator did not tell us if the spirits are responsible for the death of his biological parents; the way his parents died while he was still a boy is suspicious. We cannot say anything about the death of Jehan's biological mother because the narrator provided us with no details. But with a close reading of the novel, we cannot but say that the mysterious death of Jehan's father is linked with some spirit activities. How else can one interpret the death of a man who after being informed of his wife's death, cried and lamented "and a few minutes later slumped"? (14)

The death of Jehan's sister is also of great concern because of the way she died. It is believed among the Igbo that "when a large ball of breadfruit" falls on someone's head, as was the case with her "as she walked on a village path" (15), the spirits are at work. However, the mysteries of his parents' death, his sister's death and his mother's sister, Clara's children's death were later linked to Jehan when Clara's husband consulted different oracles:

Baffled at this development, Clara's husband decided it was necessary he discovered why the sudden deaths of the children. The first and second men he consulted warned, as if in agreement, of an impending calamity, unless the orphan staying with them was separated from the family. They warned that it was the forces which made Jehan orphan that were still at work. The third seer Clara's husband consulted said something equivalent, but added that Jehan wouldn't be affected because he had many gods fighting for the safety of his life. Thus, a bullet aimed at Jehan could strike and kill somebody nearby, while Jehan would go unscathed, the seer emphasized. (15)

When her husband returned home and presented Clara with the options of either killing him or leading him into the forest to be eaten up by wild animals, she chose the latter. Having escaped death in the forest, he was rescued and picked up by Mary-Ann, another spiritual human being—though Mary-Ann treated him as her child and trained him into somebody of repute. It is until Mary-Ann's death and her subsequent exhumation by the monstrous native doctor that Jehan Boha regained his spiritual freedom.

In the novel, the narrator creates a dynamic character in Mary-Ann. He presents her as a character that could be good or bad at will. She is a character of unpredictable personality—not even the reader could predict her. When it comes to fighting for other individual's just course, she does so as if the fight is hers. At other times in the novel, she is presented to be very bad. That is why her neighbours and her husband fear her. We would have said her unpredictable nature is as a result of her spiritual involvement but at the beginning of the story the narrator made us to realize that Mary-Ann is such a personality from birth and that it is as a result of her unpredictability and stubbornness that she went to the stream to fetch water at a time that was exclusively meant for the spirits. Hence, the spirit of the Queen mother possessed her and got her physically barren but spiritually fertile. It is in the novel that such issue as the possibility of someone being fertile in the spirit realm and then barren in the physical realm is revealed. Mary-Ann, who is though barren throughout the novel, has many children in the marine world. The peaceful marriage which she could not have in the physical, she had in the marine world. Though, she would have had a successful marriage in the physical realm, if not for the interference of her spirit husband in her physical marriage. This is evident in the story thus:

As regards her first marriage, on two different occasions, a strange man confronted Mary-Ann's former husband. One was in a dream. The other was physical, by daylight. That morning, the Sunday mass just ended. Out of the church building, the strange man asked Mary-Ann's former husband whether it was right and proper for he who claimed to be a Christian to take as a wife a woman already married by another man. Mary-Ann's former husband looked flabbergasted, and ignored his questioner because he was quite sure that his wife was a spinster at the time he met her. If not that Mary-Ann's husband was prayerful and strong in spirit, he would have died while asleep as a result of constant fighting in dreams with that strange man who asked him the questions. [...] But the man decided to call it quit with the marriage when this particular man he encountered in dreams took a bolder step, and visited and confronted him in his home. (34–5)

The narrator did not also tell us why the spirit of Mary-Ann's marine husband did not disturb Jamie Boha, Mary-Ann's last husband. Perhaps, it could be because Jamie Boha is faced with a problem that is as serious as the experiences of Mary-Ann's former husbands. Unlike Mary-Ann's former husbands that were constantly tormented by Mary-Ann's spiritual husband, Mary-Ann was always frightening Jamie Boha. One thing that gets the reader wondering is the fact that despite all her threats at Jamie Boha, she does not harm him. When Jamie Boha took another wife, one expects Mary-Ann to possibly kill Jamie Boha but is disappointed—she though threatened him but stopped at that. Instead of now troubling Jamie Boha, she transferred her troubles onto the new wife, Florence. When finally she felt hurt because of Jamie's decision and his marriage to Florence, she taught Jamie some lessons by also threatening him with her spiritual powers. After being spiritually harassed, "Jamie took Florence to another part of the village" (9) abandoning his family house for Mary-Ann. When people now ask Jamie why he left his family house, he told them that "Mary-Ann was a witch who loved to inflict pains and injury on people around her" (9). With a close reading of the novel one can tell that Mary-Ann loved Jamie Boha and had speared him because of that. Where she would had harmed him out of anger, as some other persons possessed by marine spirits in contemporary African society would do, she chose to harass him spiritually. Her love for Jamie Boha was further expressed when Clara came seeking to claim Jehan Victor Boha. She quickly ran to Jamie for assistance and together they resisted Clara and maintained that Jehan Victor Boha was their adopted son. Jamie Boha supported Mary-Ann in making sure Jehan Boha was not taken away by Clara, but when later Mary-Ann manipulated Jehan into becoming a pastor, Jamie ceased to have anything to do with them. This is simply because he seems to know that Mary-Ann is behind all that and that her powers are not genuine. It seems it is with the establishment of the church, "Lonely Path to the River of Greatness Church", that her assignment on earth (as a living

human being) is sealed as completed. The queen mother then gave her another assignment which required her “transformation” through death. Though she protested, the queen mother assures her, thus: “No protests, my daughter. Who in his or her right senses refuses a promotion? After the transformation, you will be allowed to live in the two worlds. Over here, you will see that there is no enjoyment on earth.” (82–3) With her death, however, she became a problem to her husband and the people of her community. Her subsequent exhumation brought peace to the community and freedom to Jehan Boha. This is what makes Jehan Boha’s sermon after his spiritual freedom a remarkable one, especially when he says:

Thus, dear brethren, beware of the preachers you follow, the type of church you go to, and the type of god some of the so-called men of God ask you to worship. Beware of fake and dubious prophets and messengers of doom! Most importantly, beware of those agents of uncertain gods who may increase your troubles by clandestinely initiating you into a group where you would lose your spiritual freedom and be in bondage. Today, Jehan Victor Boha is freed from the clutches of mermaids. For all of you who have witnessed it all, if only you will make use of the lessons derived from the experiences of Jehan Boha, you will not fall into their trap. (6)

However, after Mary-Ann’s exhumation, Jehan Boha’s life returned to normal. He was called back to the university and paid for all the years in which his unemployment lasted. This also applied to the community where Mary-Ann lived. The community that had not experienced peace for a long time now started experiencing it.

In conclusion, Ibezute’s *The Temporal Gods and Goddess in the Cathedral*, can be said to have been created using what we earlier referred to as the “ingredients” of African folklore—proverbs, and the rest of others. One other fascinating thing about the two novels is that the stories and all the “ingredients” with which they were created are made whole through the use of didacticism. This is because in telling African story, a lot of traditional African oral “ingredients”, such as proverbs, songs, symbols etc., cannot be disassociated from it and in order to achieve a creative whole, the writer blends the whole of these “ingredients” together with the help of didacticism. However, through telling stories that are didactic, the writer has succeeded in “domesticating” his stories so that they also carry in them the African contemporary experience. For instance, through the story we have come to know that people can be spiritually caged (or be made to be in spiritual bondage) in Africa. It is possible to argue that Ogonna in *The Temporal Gods* and Jehan in *Goddess in the Cathedral* represent individuals in different spiritual bondages in Africa. Using the stories in the novels, the narrator seems to be saying that, though these spiritual bondages are only temporal, they usually act as setbacks in the lives of these persons. And that in Africa of this postmodern generation the survival of any promising individual is by the grace of God. The reason for this is not unconnected to the existence of the two different

warring religions, traditional worship and Christianity, that are evident in the societies of the two novels. While traditional worship is the inherited religion of Africans of the postmodern generation, Christianity is a religion that though is brought to us, that we have come to embrace. Just that as Jung rightly observed “the invasion of evil signifies that something previously good has turned into something harmful” (qtd in Spiegelman 1): the coming of Christianity to Africa is with its two sides: good and bad. The good side of it is that it brought the direct worship of God through his son, Jesus Christ. The bad side of it is that some individuals now use it as a means to exploit people and to get themselves rich. As if realising this all of a sudden, after being freed from his spiritual bondage, Jehan Boha confessed and at the same time lamented, thus:

The pulpit has been taken over by medicine men exhibiting their voodooos and drug addiction in the name of preaching the gospel; and by men of incantations who engage in modernized ancient oracles in the name of prophecy. As a matter of fact, men who are in contact with mermaids, gods and goddesses are now involved in preaching the gospel and winning converts among today’s clergymen. (6)

Through the use of Jehan Boha’s confessions and lamentations the narrator emphasizes the didacticism that is inherent in the story. We know that a story can be didactic and then not carry the burden of the generational experience. For example, it is common to see in the work of a writer of postmodern generation, a story that though teaches but is set in Europe with characters that have European names and experience that is exclusively European—a version of didacticism that is popular among the writers of this generation. The beauty of Ibezute’s *The Temporal Gods and Goddess in the Cathedral* is that we learnt the lessons of the story through the beauty of African life and experience—the kind of didacticism which African literature emphasizes.

In *The Temporal Gods*, we also learnt a number of these. Among them is how to recognize a genuine pastor. This is achieved in the novel by narrating how each one of the pastors carry on with the activities of his church. While one is so much interested in money and would go out of his way to prescribe things that are “more than what it cost to make sacrifice after consulting a native doctor”, (78) the other “conducted his affairs with total dedication to God in accordance with the principles of the first apostles of Jesus Christ. He preached the salvation of the soul and not of the body” and his “principle was to win more souls for Jesus Christ and not to amass wealth” (88). All these and more are the things the novels aim at informing or educating his readers on. And among the things that helped these lessons to come alive is the fact that the writer captures the realities of contemporary African life in such a way that the aura of African reality is felt in a way that we can associate ourselves with them as stories from African soil—as our own very story.

Note

1. I have written somewhere that “the postmodern generation” is the third generation of African writers. It was Donatus Nwoga in his *West African Verse* (1967) who described the writers of the first generation as “the modernist”, while Charles Nnolim described the writers of the second generation, in his essay “Contemporary Nigerian Fiction,” as “the ideological generation”.

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