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Christianity, Colonialism and African Identity in Selected African Plays: A Postcolonial-Theological Reading

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Abstract

This study examines the relationship between Christianity, colonialism, and African identity in selected African plays through a postcolonial-theological perspective. It explores how Christian beliefs and institutions, introduced during colonial rule, interacted with indigenous religious systems, cultural practices, and conceptions of identity. Using selected dramatic texts as primary sources, the study interrogates the representation of Christianity as both a vehicle of colonial influence and a resource for moral, cultural, and spiritual negotiation. The analysis focuses on tensions between Christian theology and indigenous worldviews, the disruption of traditional identities, and the ways African characters respond to religious and cultural domination. A postcolonial-theological approach is adopted to bring together postcolonial criticism and theological inquiry, allowing the study to examine both the colonial uses of Christianity and possibilities for an African-centred reinterpretation of Christian faith. The study argues that the selected plays do not present African identity as simply destroyed by Christianity or colonialism; rather, they portray identity as contested, negotiated, and continually reconstructed. The study concludes that African drama provides a critical space for questioning colonial representations of Christianity while exploring forms of faith that engage African cultural realities and historical experience.

Keywords: Christianity; Colonialism; African Identity; Postcolonial Theology; African Drama; Cultural Hybridity.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to Christianity, Colonialism, and African Identity

Christianity occupies a complex position in African history. Although Christianity has ancient roots in parts of Africa, its modern expansion across much of the continent was closely associated with European missionary activity and colonial expansion. The missionary enterprise introduced new religious ideas while also encountering established African systems of belief, social organisation, and cultural meanings. Consequently, the Christian encounter was not simply a religious development; it became part of a wider process through which African societies negotiated European cultural and political

power. Sugirtharajah observes that the Bible became implicated in European expansion and was subsequently appropriated and reinterpreted by colonised peoples (45–73).

The relationship between Christianity and African culture, however, cannot be reduced to a simple opposition between European religion and African tradition. African societies actively interpreted, adapted, resisted, and transformed Christianity. Mbiti's study of African religious thought demonstrates the depth and coherence of indigenous African religious worldviews,

challenging representations of African societies as spiritually or philosophically empty before missionary intervention. His work therefore provides an important basis for examining what happened when Christian theology encountered pre-existing African understandings of God, community, morality, existence, and ancestry (Mbiti).

Colonialism nevertheless altered the conditions under which these encounters occurred. Christianity could function simultaneously as a faith tradition and as an instrument within structures of cultural authority. Missionary education, language, conversion, and European conceptions of civilisation often contributed to the displacement of indigenous cultural practices. Sugirtharajah identifies the colonial period as a crucial stage in the circulation and interpretation of the Bible in non-Western societies, while also showing that the same biblical tradition was later reclaimed and reread from postcolonial perspectives.

African literature has provided an important space for interrogating these contradictions. Drama, in particular, represents cultural conflict through dialogue, characterisation, ritual, performance, and competing systems of authority. African playwrights can therefore expose the tensions between Christian doctrine and indigenous belief while examining the consequences of colonial cultural intervention. Such representations also complicate the idea of a fixed African identity. Mudimbe argues that what is understood as “Africa” has been shaped by competing systems of knowledge and representation, including Western constructions of African history and identity. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o similarly connects cultural domination with language and literary production, arguing for the recovery of African perspectives from structures inherited from colonialism.

Against this background, the present study reads selected African plays as sites where Christianity, colonial power, indigenous belief, and African identity intersect. Rather than treating Christianity exclusively as an instrument of colonial domination or as an unproblematic source of liberation, the study examines its contradictory representations and the ways African characters negotiate religious and cultural change.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The relationship between Christianity and African identity remains contested because the Christian encounter occurred within unequal colonial structures. Existing scholarship has established the significance of religion, colonialism, culture, and identity in African literary studies, yet scholars often examine these dimensions separately. A literary analysis may emphasise colonial domination without sufficiently considering theological questions, while theological discussions may overlook the cultural and political conflicts represented in African drama.

The problem addressed by this study is therefore the insufficient integration of postcolonial and theological perspectives in examining dramatic representations of Christianity and African identity. The selected plays provide a useful space for investigating how Christianity is represented in relation to indigenous religion, colonial authority, cultural displacement, resistance, and identity formation. The study consequently asks whether the plays portray Christianity primarily as a colonial legacy, a contested spiritual tradition, a source of cultural transformation, or a combination of these positions.

1.3 Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to examine the representation of Christianity, colonialism, and African identity in selected African plays through a postcolonial-theological reading. The specific objectives are:

1. Examine the representation of Christianity in the selected plays;
2. Analyse the relationship between Christian discourse and colonial power;
3. Investigate conflicts between Christianity and indigenous African religious and cultural systems;
4. Examine how the plays represent resistance, negotiation, and transformation of African identity; and
5. Assess the usefulness of postcolonial theology in interpreting these representations.

1.4 Research Questions

The study is guided by the following questions:

1. How is Christianity represented in the selected African plays?
2. How do the plays connect Christianity with colonial power and cultural authority?
3. What conflicts emerge between Christian beliefs and indigenous African religious and cultural systems?
4. How do the selected plays represent the negotiation and reconstruction of African identity?
5. How does a postcolonial-theological approach deepen the interpretation of Christianity and African identity in the selected plays?

1.5 Significance of the Study

The study contributes to African literary scholarship by bringing literary, postcolonial, and theological perspectives into a single interpretive framework. It demonstrates how African drama can interrogate the historical relationship between Christianity and colonialism without reducing African responses to either passive acceptance or absolute rejection.

The study is also significant to postcolonial theology because it treats African literary texts as sites of theological reflection. Sugirtharajah’s account of

postcolonial biblical interpretation demonstrates the importance of examining how formerly colonised communities appropriate and reinterpret Christian texts and traditions. The present study extends this concern into African drama by examining how theatrical representations negotiate religious authority, cultural memory, and identity.

For African cultural studies, the study highlights the continuing importance of indigenous knowledge systems in discussions of Christianity and identity. It further demonstrates that African identity is not a static cultural category but a contested formation shaped by history, religion, colonial encounter, resistance, and cultural adaptation.

1.6 Scope of the Study

The study focuses on selected African plays that engage directly or indirectly with Christianity, colonialism, indigenous belief, and African identity. Its analysis is restricted to representations within the selected dramatic texts rather than to the historical development of Christianity across the entire African continent.

The study adopts a postcolonial-theological perspective, drawing particularly on concepts of colonial discourse, cultural representation, religious encounter, resistance, appropriation, and identity. It does not seek to determine the theological validity of Christianity or indigenous African religions. Rather, it examines how the selected playwrights represent and interrogate these traditions within the historical and cultural conditions of the African postcolonial experience.

2.0 CHRISTIANITY, COLONIALISM, AND AFRICAN IDENTITY

2.1 Christianity and the Colonial Encounter in Africa

The encounter between Christianity and Africa predates European colonialism, particularly in North and Northeast Africa. However, the nineteenth-century expansion of European missionary Christianity across much of sub-Saharan Africa became closely connected with the wider colonial project. Christianity was consequently introduced within a context in which religious conversion, European education, political authority, and claims about civilisation frequently intersected. Sugirtharajah describes the Bible as both a religious text and a significant instrument in the history of European expansion, noting its subsequent appropriation and reinterpretation by colonised people.

The colonial encounter therefore produced an ambivalent relationship between Christianity and African societies. Missionaries established schools, churches, and new forms of literacy, while simultaneously challenging indigenous religious practices and cultural institutions. Christianity could consequently operate as an instrument of cultural transformation without being reducible to colonial domination. Its meaning depended

partly on how Africans received, interpreted, resisted, and appropriated the new faith. This distinction is important because African Christians were not merely passive recipients of European Christianity; they became participants in reshaping its meanings within African social and cultural contexts.

The history of Christianity in Africa thus involves both domination and appropriation. While colonial structures frequently gave European missionaries institutional authority, African converts increasingly interpreted Christianity through local languages, cultural categories, and experiences. The colonial encounter consequently created a contested religious space where European theological assumptions clashed with established African understandings of spirituality, community, morality, and personhood. Sugirtharajah's distinction between colonial appropriation and later postcolonial reclamation is particularly useful for understanding this tension.

2.2 Colonial Disruption of Indigenous Religious and Cultural Systems

One of the major consequences of missionary expansion was the reclassification of African religious practices according to European Christian categories. Indigenous rituals, ancestral practices, sacred objects, communal ceremonies, and traditional institutions were frequently judged according to assumptions about Christian superiority and civilisation. Recent historical studies on colonial Malawi illustrate that Protestant missionaries endeavoured, in diverse contexts, to isolate converts from African cultural influences and to interpret converts from African cultural influences and indigenous spirituality through Christian conceptual frameworks.

Such processes affected more than religious belief. Indigenous religion was closely connected to social organisation, morality, communal identity, language, ritual authority, and conceptions of the human person. Its displacement therefore had implications for the wider cultural structure of African communities. The missionary tendency to distinguish Christianity as civilised and indigenous religions as backward contributed to the marginalisation of African religious knowledge. Recent scholarship on West Africa similarly shows how colonial and Christian discourses of civility and barbarity contributed to transforming indigenous religions from comprehensive systems of meaning into objects merely labelled as "culture".

The disruption was nevertheless neither complete nor uniform. African communities preserved elements of indigenous belief within changing religious environments, while converts frequently adapted Christian teachings to existing cultural assumptions. Consequently, the colonial encounter produced neither the total disappearance of African religious systems nor the complete triumph of European Christianity. Instead, it generated processes of

negotiation in which old and new religious meanings interacted.

2.3 African Identity, Resistance, and Cultural Negotiation

African identity in the colonial and postcolonial context cannot therefore be understood as a fixed inheritance untouched by historical change. It emerged through encounters among indigenous traditions, Christianity, colonial institutions, and African responses to European cultural authority. Resistance was expressed not only through political opposition but also through language, literature, religious reinterpretation, cultural memory, and the preservation of indigenous practices.

African responses to Christianity included rejection, selective acceptance, reinterpretation, and appropriation. The Bible itself became a contested text: although it could be employed within colonial structures, Africans also used Christian discourse to challenge oppression and articulate alternative visions of justice and liberation. Sugirtharajah's discussion of resistance and postcolonial reclamation demonstrates that colonised communities did not simply inherit Christian texts passively; they developed interpretive practices through which those texts could be redirected against the structures of domination.

This process is particularly relevant to African literature. Literary texts can recover cultural memories that colonial discourse attempted to suppress and can expose the contradictions within colonial representations of African religions and identities. African drama is especially suited to this task because its use of dialogue, ritual, character conflict, and performance enables competing systems of meaning to appear simultaneously. Christianity may therefore be represented as an imposed colonial institution in one context and as a faith appropriated and transformed by Africans in another.

The continuing negotiation between Christianity and African cultural identity is evident in contemporary African Christian practices. Research on African Christian spirituality shows that indigenous language, literature, music, prayer, symbolism, and cultural values continue to influence Christian theological expression. Thus, resistance does not necessarily require the rejection of Christianity; it may involve reclaiming Christianity from colonial cultural assumptions and expressing it through African categories.

2.4 Christianity and the Question of Cultural Hybridity

The interaction between Christianity and African culture has produced forms of religious and cultural hybridity. Hybridity here refers not simply to the mixture of two cultures but to the creative and sometimes contested processes through which people negotiate different

systems of meaning. André Mary describes African Christian identity in terms of processes of *métissage* and *bricolage*, emphasising the appropriation and recombination of cultural elements within the continuing legacy of colonial encounters.

African Christianity consequently cannot be adequately explained as either wholly European or wholly indigenous. African Christians may affirm Christian doctrines while retaining cultural concepts, symbols, communal values, musical forms, linguistic expressions, and understandings of spirituality rooted in African traditions. Recent scholarship similarly demonstrates that indigenous spiritual symbols and values continue to shape African Christian identity and theological meaning-making.

This hybridity, however, should not be romanticised. It can involve unequal relations of power, unresolved tensions, and competing claims to religious authenticity. The central issue is therefore not whether African Christianity is "pure" but how Africans negotiate Christianity within historical conditions shaped by colonialism. From a postcolonial-theological perspective, such negotiation becomes a form of intellectual and spiritual agency: African subjects reinterpret inherited Christian traditions rather than merely reproducing their colonial meanings.

For the selected African plays, cultural hybridity provides an important interpretive category. Characters who move between Christian and indigenous worlds may embody the broader historical tensions produced by colonialism. Their conflicts reveal that African identity is neither completely traditional nor simply Western. It is continually reconstructed through encounters among religion, culture, history, and power. The plays therefore offer a literary space for examining Christianity not only as a legacy of colonialism but also as a tradition that African societies have appropriated, contested, and transformed.

3.0 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: POSTCOLONIAL THEOLOGY

3.1 Postcolonial Theory and African Literary Criticism

Postcolonial theory examines the cultural, political, and epistemological consequences of colonial domination. In African literary criticism, its value lies in exposing the assumptions through which colonial discourse represented Africa, Africans, and African cultures. Rather than treating African literature merely as a response to European literature, postcolonial criticism considers how African writers challenge inherited structures of representation and recover alternative ways of understanding African experience.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o identifies language as a central site of colonial domination because colonial education could detach African subjects from indigenous cultural memory and systems of knowledge. His argument for

decolonising literary consciousness is therefore relevant to African drama, where language, storytelling, ritual, and cultural symbolism can become instruments for challenging colonial representations (Ngũgĩ). His intervention is particularly useful to the present study because the selected plays engage questions of cultural identity within societies transformed by colonial Christianity.

Postcolonial criticism also questions the assumption that colonial influence produces a simple opposition between the coloniser and the colonised. Colonial encounters generate complex processes of accommodation, resistance, appropriation, and cultural negotiation. Mudimbe's analysis reveals that Western epistemological categories have shaped representations of Africa. His concept of the "invention" of Africa is therefore useful for examining how African identity is represented, classified, and contested within colonial and postcolonial discourse (Mudimbe).

For the present study, postcolonial literary criticism provides the first level of interpretation. It directs attention to power, representation, cultural displacement, resistance, and identity. However, because the selected plays deal specifically with Christianity and religious belief, postcolonial criticism alone does not sufficiently address the theological dimensions of the texts. This limitation necessitates its combination with postcolonial theology.

3.2 Theology and the Colonial Legacy

The relationship between Christianity and colonialism presents a significant theological problem. European colonialism did not create Christianity, which has deep historical roots in Africa. Nevertheless, modern missionary Christianity frequently entered African societies through European colonial structures. Consequently, the colonial encounter entangled the Bible, Christian education, missionary institutions, and European cultural assumptions.

Sugirtharajah demonstrates that the Bible occupied different positions across precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial contexts. It could function as a text associated with European expansion while also becoming a resource appropriated and reinterpreted by colonised communities. This dual history makes it inadequate to regard Christianity simply as either a colonial instrument or an entirely emancipatory force.

The theological problem is therefore one of interpretation and power. Whose understanding of Christianity becomes authoritative? Which cultural assumptions are treated as genuinely Christian, and which are dismissed as indigenous or primitive? Postcolonial theology addresses these questions by examining the historical relationship between Christian discourse and systems of domination. It seeks to identify interpretations that reproduce colonial hierarchies and to

create space for perspectives historically excluded from theological authority.

This approach is particularly important in the African context because indigenous religious and cultural knowledge was often evaluated through imported theological categories. The result was not merely religious conversion but a contest over knowledge, morality, identity, and cultural legitimacy. The selected plays provide a literary means of examining this contest by placing Christian and indigenous worldviews within dramatic conflict.

3.3 Postcolonial Theology as an Interpretive Framework

Postcolonial theology provides the principal theoretical framework for this study because it connects questions of colonial power with questions of religious meaning. Its central concern is not simply whether Christianity was involved in colonialism but how Christian texts, doctrines, institutions, and interpretations have participated in, resisted, or been transformed by colonial histories.

Sugirtharajah's formulation is especially relevant because he treats postcolonial interpretation as a critical practice that interrogates dominant readings while attending to marginalised voices. His chapter on "postcolonialising" biblical interpretation explicitly considers the applicability of postcolonialism to biblical studies and its relationship to liberation-orientated approaches (Sugirtharajah). The approach therefore permits the researcher to examine Christianity simultaneously as a historical inheritance, a cultural force, and a contested system of meaning.

Four analytical concerns guide the application of the framework in this study. First, we examine power by asking how Christianity relates to colonial authority and institutional control. Second, representation considers how Christian and indigenous identities are constructed within the plays. Third, resistance examines how African characters challenge, appropriate, or reinterpret dominant religious meanings. Fourth, identity considers how encounters between Christianity and indigenous culture contribute to the reconstruction of African subjectivity.

Postcolonial theology is therefore not employed to determine whether Christianity or indigenous religion is inherently superior. Its purpose is to expose the historical and ideological conditions through which religious meanings are produced. This makes it appropriate for a literary study concerned with the interaction of faith, colonial history, and African identity.

3.4 Re-reading Christianity from African Perspectives

A postcolonial-theological reading requires Christianity to be examined from the standpoint of African

historical and cultural experience. This does not mean replacing one rigid orthodoxy with another. Rather, it involves recognising that Christian interpretation is shaped by the cultural locations of its readers. Sugirtharajah's account of postcolonial reclamation demonstrates that communities previously positioned at the margins have actively appropriated and reinterpreted biblical traditions rather than merely accepting colonial interpretations.

Such rereading is significant because African Christians have encountered Christianity through cultural systems that predate European missionary activity. Concepts of community, spirituality, kinship, authority, morality, ancestry, and sacred space influence how Christian ideas are understood. African theological interpretation therefore becomes a site of dialogue between inherited Christian traditions and African cultural experience.

The literary dimension of this process is equally important. African playwrights can question colonial Christian assumptions without necessarily rejecting Christianity itself. They may distinguish between the Christian faith and the colonial structures through which that faith was historically introduced. They may also represent characters who combine Christian belief with elements of indigenous cultural identity, thereby challenging rigid distinctions between "Christian" and "African."

This rereading also supports a more complex view of African identity. The African subject in postcolonial drama is more than just a victim of colonial Christianity or an untouched representative of precolonial tradition. Identity emerges through negotiation. Christianity may be resisted, accepted, adapted, or transformed, while indigenous traditions may be preserved, reconstructed, or selectively incorporated into new religious identities.

Accordingly, postcolonial theology enables this study to read the selected plays as sites of religious contestation and cultural reconstruction. The framework brings together three interconnected questions: how colonial power shaped representations of Christianity; how African subjects responded to that religious and cultural encounter; and how those responses contributed to new understandings of African identity. It thus provides an appropriate theoretical foundation for analysing the selected plays beyond a simple Christianity-versus-tradition binary.

4.0 POSTCOLONIAL-THEOLOGICAL READING OF SELECTED PLAYS

This section applies the postcolonial-theological framework to the selected African plays, focusing on the intersection of Christianity, colonial authority, indigenous religious systems, and African identity. The analysis treats the plays as cultural texts in which religious belief is inseparable from questions of power, history, community,

and identity. Scholarship on African literature and religion similarly identifies literary texts as important sites for representing, critiquing, and reimagining religious traditions, particularly in relation to colonialism and gender.

4.1 Representation of Christianity and Colonial Power

The selected plays present Christianity within the historical contradictions of the colonial encounter. Christianity is not represented merely as a private system of faith; in several African literary contexts, it is connected with education, European authority, social reorganisation, and changing conceptions of cultural legitimacy. A postcolonial-theological reading therefore asks not only what Christianity means within the plays but also who possesses the authority to define its meaning.

This distinction is important because colonial Christianity often operated within institutions that possessed greater political and cultural power than indigenous communities. Missionary teaching could challenge indigenous religious practices while presenting European cultural values as markers of civilisation. The resulting conflict was consequently theological and political at the same time. The problem was not simply that one religion encountered another but that the encounter occurred within an unequal structure of power.

African playwrights frequently expose this contradiction by placing Christian symbols, institutions, and characters alongside indigenous systems of belief. Christianity may appear as a vehicle of cultural domination, yet the plays also demonstrate that African subjects can appropriate Christian language for their purposes. Research on Ngũgĩ, for instance, shows that Christianity can function simultaneously as an object of critique and as a literary resource for challenging colonial and neo-colonial exploitation.

The representation of Christianity should therefore not be reduced to an uncomplicated opposition between "Christianity" and "Africa". The more significant issue is the struggle over interpretation. The selected plays expose the colonial use of religious authority while creating space for African characters to question, reinterpret, or reclaim Christian meanings.

4.2 Indigenous Religion and Cultural Conflict

The conflict between Christianity and indigenous religion constitutes a major dimension of the postcolonial African literary imagination. Indigenous religion is often represented not as an isolated collection of rituals but as part of a broader cultural system involving morality, kinship, ancestry, communal responsibility, authority, and relations between the visible and spiritual worlds. The displacement of indigenous religious practices therefore carries consequences for cultural identity. When

traditional rituals are condemned as pagan or primitive, the communities associated with them experience not merely religious criticism but an attack on the legitimacy of their cultural knowledge. The Christian encounter consequently becomes a struggle over which worldview has the authority to define truth.

Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, although a novel rather than a play, offers a useful comparative example. Galván Reula and Galván Álvarez demonstrate that the confrontation between Christianity and Igbo religion is inseparable from colonial appropriation while also identifying gender as part of the religious conflict. The insight is relevant to African drama because religious conflict frequently intersects with existing social tensions rather than replacing them.

In Soyinka's drama, indigenous spirituality similarly possesses a structural rather than decorative function. Scholarship on his theatre identifies African spiritualities and ancestral consciousness as important foundations of his dramatic imagination. A postcolonial-theological reading therefore takes indigenous religious concepts seriously as systems of meaning rather than treating them as folkloric elements.

The selected plays consequently reveal cultural conflict as a struggle between competing epistemologies. Christianity introduces alternative understandings of God, morality, authority, and salvation, while indigenous traditions provide established frameworks through which communities understand existence and social responsibility. The dramatic tension arises from the incapacity of these systems to interact without power dynamics.

4.3 Conversion, Resistance, and Identity Formation

Conversion in the selected plays should be understood as a process of identity transformation rather than merely a change of religious affiliation. To become Christian within a colonial environment could involve changes in family relationships, communal status, education, language, marriage practices, and attitudes toward indigenous traditions. Conversion could consequently produce both new possibilities and forms of alienation.

Yet African converts are not necessarily represented as passive victims. Conversion may be selective, strategic, or internally contested. Characters can accept Christian beliefs while retaining aspects of indigenous identity, producing complex religious subjectivities. Conversely, characters who resist Christianity may do so not because they reject every Christian principle but because they associate missionary religion with cultural dispossession.

This tension is particularly important in interpreting resistance. Resistance may take the form of rejecting conversion, preserving indigenous practices, questioning missionaries, reclaiming African languages, or

appropriating Christian concepts against colonial authority. Ngũgĩ's dramatic work illustrates this broader pattern: his postcolonial theatre uses African oral forms and cultural resources to challenge structures of exploitation and domination.

The process produces what may be described as contested identity formation. The African subject is situated between inherited cultural traditions and introduced religious systems. Identity consequently develops through negotiation rather than simple replacement. The selected plays dramatise this process by showing characters who must determine what it means to remain African within religious and cultural structures transformed by colonialism.

4.4 Gender, Community, and Religious Authority

Gender is significant where religious conversion alters established structures of authority. Christianity may challenge certain indigenous practices while simultaneously introducing new forms of patriarchal authority. The question is therefore not whether Christianity is simply liberating or oppressive to women; rather, the plays should be examined for the specific ways in which religious change reorganises gender relations.

The intersection of gender and religious authority is evident in scholarship on African representations of Christianity. The study of Achebe's religious world, for example, identifies gender as part of the confrontation between Christianity and indigenous Igbo religion. (More broadly, recent scholarship on religion in African literature identifies gender and sexuality among the areas through which literary texts critique religious institutions and imagine alternative possibilities.

Community is equally important. Indigenous African religious systems generally locate religious identity within communal relationships, whereas missionary Christianity can introduce new institutional affiliations that compete with existing structures of authority. Conversion may therefore create divisions between converts and non-converts, younger and older generations, or traditional authorities and Christian leaders.

The selected plays can consequently be read as examining who is entitled to speak for the community. Priests, elders, chiefs, missionaries, converts, women, and younger characters may occupy competing positions of authority. Religious conflict thus becomes a wider contest over social legitimacy.

4.5 Negotiation and Reconstruction of African Identity

The central implication of the selected plays is that African identity cannot be understood as a fixed cultural essence existing outside history. Colonialism disrupted established structures, Christianity introduced new religious and cultural categories, and Africans responded

through resistance, adaptation, appropriation, and reinterpretation. Identity therefore emerged through continuous negotiation.

This process corresponds with the broader postcolonial concept of cultural hybridity. African subjects may inhabit Christian and indigenous cultural worlds simultaneously without being reducible to either. Such hybridity should not, however, be interpreted as evidence that colonial differences have disappeared. The historical inequalities that produced the encounter remain important. What changes is the capacity of African subjects to appropriate elements of the encounter and assign them new meanings.

Ola Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not to Blame* provides a particularly useful example of this process. Ogude reads the play as an allegory of colonisation and decolonisation, arguing that its protagonist embodies the paradox of political liberation occurring alongside continued cultural dependence. Simpson similarly identifies Rotimi's adaptation as a form of canonical counter-discourse through which an African dramatist negotiates independence from the European classical tradition.

The same principle can be extended to the representation of Christianity. The selected plays do not necessarily call for a return to an untouched precolonial past. Instead, they reveal the possibility of reconstructing African identity through critical engagement with both indigenous traditions and Christianity. Christianity can be questioned where it reproduces colonial assumptions and appropriated where its ethical or spiritual resources are meaningful within African experience.

The reconstruction of identity is therefore neither rejection nor imitation. It is **selective appropriation**. African characters and communities determine which inherited traditions, religious ideas, cultural practices, and modern influences can contribute to their understanding of themselves. In this sense, the selected plays transform the colonial encounter from a story of cultural disappearance into a continuing struggle over meaning and self-definition.

A postcolonial-theological reading consequently reveals Christianity as a contested field rather than a uniform colonial legacy. The plays expose its historical entanglement with colonial authority while also demonstrating the possibility of African reinterpretation. Their deeper concern is the recovery of agency: the ability of African subjects to determine the religious, cultural, and ethical terms through which African identity is understood.

5.0 CONCLUSION

5.1 Major Findings

The study examined the relationship between Christianity, colonialism, and African identity in selected African plays through a postcolonial-theological framework. The analysis establishes that Christianity is

represented in the selected dramatic texts as a complex historical and cultural force rather than as either an exclusively oppressive or wholly liberating institution.

First, the study finds that Christianity became closely associated with colonial structures of authority in several representations. Missionary religion, education, and European cultural values frequently appear together, making religious conversion inseparable from broader processes of cultural transformation. The plays consequently expose the unequal conditions under which Christianity encountered African societies.

Second, the study finds that the encounter between Christianity and indigenous religion produces sustained cultural and theological conflict. Indigenous religious practices are not presented merely as superstitions awaiting replacement but as systems through which communities understand morality, spirituality, social responsibility, and identity. Their displacement therefore represents a wider disruption of cultural continuity.

Third, conversion is shown to be a contested process. African characters respond to Christianity through acceptance, resistance, adaptation, and selective appropriation. Conversion does not automatically erase indigenous identity; instead, it can produce new and sometimes contradictory forms of religious subjectivity.

Fourth, the study finds that African identity is represented as dynamic rather than fixed. The characters negotiate identities shaped by indigenous traditions, Christianity, colonial history, and emerging postcolonial realities. This negotiation confirms the usefulness of postcolonial theory in examining African literary representations of cultural transformation.

Finally, the study demonstrates that postcolonial theology provides an effective framework for examining the religious dimension of African drama. It makes possible an analysis that recognises Christianity's colonial history without treating African Christians as passive recipients of European theology.

5.2 Christianity, Colonialism, and the Reconstruction of Identity

The study demonstrates that understanding the relationship between Christianity and African identity requires moving beyond a simplistic Christianity-versus-tradition binary. Colonialism changed the historical context of Christianity's introduction, yet African communities actively interpreted and transformed the religion.

The reconstruction of identity therefore takes place through negotiation. African characters may retain elements of indigenous culture while participating in Christian religious life. Others resist Christianity because of its association with colonial authority, while some appropriate Christian ideas as resources for challenging injustice. These responses demonstrate that cultural identity survives not through complete isolation from

external influences but through the capacity to determine how those influences are received and reinterpreted.

This finding supports the postcolonial-theological position that Christianity must be examined from the historical location of its African adherents. As Sugirtharajah demonstrates, biblical traditions that participated in colonial encounters can also be appropriated and reread from postcolonial perspectives. African Christianity is therefore not simply a European inheritance; it has become subject to African processes of interpretation, adaptation, and theological reconstruction.

The selected plays consequently shift attention from cultural loss to cultural agency. Despite colonialism's efforts to impose European cultural norms as authoritative, African subjects persist in negotiating the meanings of religion, tradition, and identity according to their perspectives.

5.3 Contribution to African Literary and Theological Studies

The study contributes to African literary scholarship by demonstrating that African drama provides an important space for examining the intersection of religion, colonial history, and identity. Rather than treating Christianity as a peripheral theme, the study indicates that religious representation can reveal deeper questions of power, cultural authority, resistance, and belonging.

The study also contributes to postcolonial theology by demonstrating the value of African dramatic literature as a source for theological reflection. Literary characters, conflicts, rituals, and narratives reveal how ordinary subjects experience and negotiate theological ideas within specific cultural contexts. Furthermore, the study contributes to interdisciplinary scholarship by bringing postcolonial literary criticism into dialogue with theology. This combination makes it possible to examine both the political history of Christianity and its continuing cultural and spiritual significance. It also avoids two limitations: interpreting Christianity solely as a colonial instrument and treating it as culturally neutral.

The study therefore proposes taking African literary texts seriously as sites of theological and cultural knowledge. Their representations of Christianity can expose colonial legacies while also revealing African capacities for religious reinterpretation.

5.4 Conclusion and Recommendations for Further Research

The study concludes that Christianity, colonialism, and African identity are interconnected but cannot be reduced to a single historical narrative. Christianity participated in colonial cultural transformation, yet African communities did not simply surrender their religious and

cultural agency. The selected plays demonstrate processes of resistance, adaptation, appropriation, and reconstruction through which African subjects negotiate the continuing consequences of the colonial encounter.

A postcolonial-theological reading consequently reveals the selected plays as texts of cultural negotiation. Their significance lies not only in their critique of colonial Christianity but also in their exploration of how African subjects reconstruct meaning after colonial disruption. African identity emerges as an evolving formation shaped by memory, indigenous traditions, Christianity, resistance, and cultural exchange.

Future research should extend this inquiry to a wider range of African playwrights and linguistic traditions. Comparative studies could examine differences between Anglophone, Francophone, Lusophone, and African-language dramatic traditions. Further studies could also investigate Christianity and gender, African Christian theatre, indigenous theology and dramatic performance, or the representation of Pentecostalism in contemporary African drama. Such studies would deepen understanding of how religion continues to influence African cultural identity in the postcolonial and contemporary periods.

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