

*S3 Literature notes*  
***The Return of Mgofu: Francis Imbuga***

**A synopsis**

A conflict arises between two formerly friendly communities in Mndika, an imaginary African state. It's the second conflict of its kind. Just like in the first conflict, the losing community is forced to take refuge in a neighboring country, Nderema, where they find a second home. Among the many that flee is a great elderly seer, Mgofu Ngoda who leaves with a young pregnant wife. He dies soon after crossing the border. His heavy wife is helped to find her way to Kadesa's shrine where there is also a camp for those who fled Mndika in the first conflict. She gives birth soon after arrival to a son who is named after his late father, Mgofu Ngoda. Mgofu becomes a very useful person both in Kadesa's shrine and in Nderema. His counsel is sought and he is such a strong pillar in Nderema's development. His son becomes the personal assistant to the Prime Minister of Nderema and the personal doctor of the leader there. His daughter is also a well respected figure who is studying international relations at the University of Southampton. The new progressive leader in Mndika, the country where Mgofu has his roots learns of Mgofu's existence. He embarks on efforts to bring back Mgofu Ngoda to Mndika, where he belongs. He sends emissaries who convince Mgofu to be the chief guest at the forthcoming National Remembrance Day. Mgofu graces the occasion with his daughter, only for his health situation to deteriorate as he makes his speech.

**The plot**  
**Act One**

**Scene One**

The scene opens to a market where there are buyers and sellers. Thori, an old man is pushing a woman (Thoriwa) on a wheelchair and the two are said to be messengers from the ancestors. They intend to address the people in the market but Thori is rather hesitant. After some discussion and coaxing by Thoriwa, Thori agrees to address the crowd, and he goes ahead to introduce Thoriwa and himself as a former couple and keepers of the shrine then. That was before the first madness broke out, which saw neighbour fight, burn and kill neighbour. He proceeds to narrate the goings-on that saw Mgofu Ngoda, themselves and many others burnt to death, which consequently transferred them to the kingdom of ancestors, from 50 which they have now been sent as messengers. This chronicle by Thori assisted by Thoriwa, serves as an exposition to the plot, letting the audience know that at some point, there was tranquility that was spoilt by the fighting that brought the current state, where there are exiles at Nderema, who originated from Mndika.

**Scene Two**

Actions move to Kadesa's shrine where we see Mude, very early in the morning, sitting on a stool outside Kadesa's shrine. In a prayerful mood, Kadesa walks to a nearby mound and begins to commune with unseen spirits. The discussion that ensues between Kadesa and Mude introduces the conflict, where Mude reports to Kadesa that he has been sent to warn them that the second madness has broken out in Mndika and therefore the camp needs protection.

The rising action is set in motion by the entry of Bizia, Kadesa's son and keeper of the shrine, where the prevailing insecurity is portrayed by the interaction between him and Mude. Bizia, who has a spear in hand, looks suspiciously at Mude, demanding to know who he is, while on the other hand, Mude draws a pistol. The tension that had built up with this incident cools down with Kadesa's introduction of the two to each other.

After this, Bizia introduces a twist to the plot with his report that his brother Matia and fellow keeper of the shrine is leading two strangers, a man and a woman to the shrine. Some tension again begins to build with Bizia's idea that they should be stopped from coming into the shrine, an idea that Kadesa immediately opposes, (with a smile) instead ordering Bizia to go and bring them to the shrine. Bizia's belief is that bringing a pregnant woman into the shrine will amount to defiling it. The man, Adonija, also reinforces Mude's message by reporting that the fighting is on again. This prompts Mude to urge Bizia and Matia to be more careful as the fighting may trickle into the shrine. Just as they are talking, the cry of a newborn is heard coming from the shrine and Adonija announces that Mgofu Ngoda has come back, reincarnated in the new born, through his second wife, Nora. Mgofu Ngoda himself is said to have died soon after crossing the border. The first scene ends with a flashback by Adonija, in which he reveals details of a meeting where inter-tribal fighting was being planned. The flashback reveals among other things, preparation of weapons and planned use of vernacular media to preach hostility between tribes. At curtains fall, Kadesa is making arrangements to bury Mgofu Ngoda.

### **Scene Three**

This opens with a revisit of Thori and Thoriwa still pushing one another on a wheel chair where Thoriwa continues to give a flashback of the history of the community. It is now another generation and the child that was born at the shrine (Mgofu Ngoda) has grown up in Nderema and become a seer like his father before him. In his address to the audience, Thori urges them to listen to Mwami Mhando, their new young leader so that he guides them to heal the wounds brought by their ancestors. He also warns them to close the doors that might trigger the recurrence of such fighting. With this, curtains fall on Scene Three with the departure of Thori and Thoriwa.

## **Act Two**

### **Scene One**

It opens to Mwami Mhando's consultation chamber, where he has just received two scouts, who are back from an errand to Mgofu Ngoda. They report that he has two children, a daughter and son, and that he is respected throughout Nderema. They also report that the son is the personal assistant to the prime minister of Nderema and that daughter, who has just completed studies in International Relations, is very keen on visiting Mndika. The scene closes with Mhando's proposal to invite Mgofu Ngoda and his daughter to their Remembrance Day festivities.

### **Scene Two**

This opens to a meeting of Mhando and some two elders at his consultation chamber. Mhando proceeds to raise some issues that need to be addressed and changed. They discuss such issues as changing the title elder to Suja, problems facing Mndika vis a vis other nations and the issue of inviting Mgofu Ngoda to come back to Mndika. Another issue that they discuss is that of the proposal by the people of Mndika to have Mhando continue to stay in leadership.

## **Act Three**

### **Scene One**

It opens with dawn breaking at Mgofu Ngoda's shrine, where two emissaries from Mndika, Mtange and Mnavi, are waiting. The shrine is a great improvement to the Kadesa one. This setting symbolizes the beginning of a new era of hope and good governance. Mgofu Ngoda talks to them after his communion with spirits. His daughter, Nora U who has just returned from studies abroad is there as he talks with them. They have come to request Mgofu to return home as well as update him on other leadership matters. As the scene ends, Mtange and Mnavi are informed by Mgofu about the death of Mama Enos, the wife of Mwami Mhando. He promises to respond to the issues

they raise after the mandatory fourteen days of mourning are over. The emissaries are surprised how Mgofu Ngoda knows this serious information yet they do not know.

### **Scene Two**

This scene marks the National Remembrance Day ceremony and the leaders who include the elders and Mhando plus Mgofu and his daughter Nora U are seated at the dais. Members of the public are in attendance too. There is an enactment of a scene of two creatures tied by a rope but pulling in two different directions. They only get the totem they each want after they have unity of purpose. After this, Mwami Mhando invites Mgofu to address the crowd followed by his daughter. They both give very inspirational speeches, marking the climax of the plot. This marks the resolution of the conflict where Mndika has been able to get back its hero. Mgofu however, falls down during his address but not before making his point. The play ends with comments by Thori and Thoriwa warning people to learn from experience that the wheelchair was not part of the original plan.

### **Setting**

Events in the play take place in Nderema and in Mndika, two neighbor countries. The conflicts in Mndika force some citizens to flee the country and settle in Nderema where they are received well. They set up camp, Kadesa's camp. The first scene happens in an open market place where we have people from all walks of life to show that the story in this play is meant to appeal to all of us. Socially, Imbuga mainly shows three communities (ridges) in Mndika who fight, leading to some to take refuge in Nderema, the neighboring country. The time is post-independence contemporary Africa.

### **Kadesa**

She is the priestess of the shrine in Nderema. She is portrayed positively to be admired.

- She is an intelligent woman with admirable communication skills.
- Kadesa is a hospitable hostess
- She is also depicted as a fearless woman.
- Kadesa is a kind woman
- Despite her status as priestess, Kadesa remains respectful.

### **Mwami Mhando**

He is the young leader of Mndika described by Thori as one with "a good head above his shoulder". This depicts him as an able leader of exceptional qualities who has managed to restore sanity in the hitherto troubled society.

- Just like many other characters in the play, the leader of the Mndika people is portrayed as a peace-loving character.
- Mhando is an intelligent leader
- He is an inquisitive leader
- In addition, Mhando is hospitable.
- It is also important to note that he has a good sense of humor.
- Mhando is a democratic leader
- Mwami Mhando's open-mindedness is yet another positive trait that makes him an outstanding character

### **Mgofu Ngoda**

He is the only son to the old half-bird seer who flees Mndika and dies after crossing the border to the south, in another country called Nderema. He takes over the administration of Kadesa's shrine after the demise of Kadesa.

Over time, he becomes an influential character in Nderema.

Just like his predecessor, he is a hospitable priest of the shrine.

- Mgofu Ngoda is an intelligent man
- He is an informed old man.
- Mgofu is also peace-loving.
- He is a strong-willed old man.
- Mgofu is a selfless character

### **Thematic concerns in *The Return of Mgofu***

In *The Return of Mgofu*, Imbuga deals with ethnic violence and its consequences, social injustice, change, leadership, the supernatural, peace and unity, forgiveness and reconciliation, and the supernatural.

#### **Violence/tribal conflict and its effects**

The three ridges of Mndika conflict with each other and the effects are catastrophic. A state of insecurity arises and the citizens seek refuge in a neighboring country, Nderema, in refugee camps.

The dialogue between Thori and Thoriwa portrays enmity and animosity between communities that had once lived in harmony. "A pity indeed! People who had even borrowed salt from one another began shaking hands with madness".

Violence has caused suffering to the people of Mndika in various ways. It has disrupted normal life. Thori reveals how they lived in a society that was organized and peaceful but had disintegrated due to violence. "Yes, people who had co-existed for long began pointing accusing fingers at one another". Moreover the issues that cause conflicts are petty issues, for example, "My land", "My cat" "My maize". The life that was once exciting when people "Performed rituals, sang, danced and laughed together" got disrupted by the chaos that had resulted from violence.

'Suja' Mdanya learns that Sariku, an orphan, was Msiega's daughter whose parents were killed due to land issues. He wonders what is very special about land that people can kill one another. "What is this about land that makes us kill one another like rogues and vagabonds?" Imbuga demonstrates how people kill each other simply because of land and other selfish gains.

#### **Peace and unity**

Thori and thoriwa in Act One, Scene Three are full of praise for Mndika's new young leader, Mwami Mhando, whose good leadership has brought peace and unity in Mndika.

Thori advises the people of Mndika to cooperate with Mwami Mhando, their leader for peaceful co-existence in Mndika. "Listen to Mwami Mhando. Discuss, consult and agree with his council of leaders and his wise counsel or you will be punished for the sins of your forefathers".

Thori sternly warns the people of Mndika against repeating the same mistakes made by their forefathers in a bid to emphasize the need for peace and unity in Mndika. ".....he who does not listen well is doomed to say, 'I wish I knew'".

While discussing about the seer who is serving the people of Nderema, Mtange insinuates that the seer be kidnapped and be brought back to Mndika but Mhando is totally against any form of violence. He wants peace. “No violence shall be witnessed in Mndika while I’m still your leader. We need lasting peace”.

Mgofu Ngoda is a very significant character for the unity of the people of Mndika. That is why his presence at the Remembrance Day festivities, even if for a few hours, matters a great deal.

The Mndika’s Remembrance Day, as organized by Mwami Mhando is intended to honor all the fallen ancestors who lost their lives and those who fled to live as refugees in neighboring countries. It is also intended to consolidate the peace and unity achieved under the able leadership of Mhando and a way of saying, “NEVER AGAIN” it is a day to remember the consequences of ensure it never happens again.

Nora Ulivaho’s speech at the Remembrance Day is loaded with a message of peace and unity. “From our short stay here, it has become obvious that your current leaders want Mndika to return to oneness and to wholeness”.

### **Change**

There are many changes the playwright hints at in the play. Change of leadership causes a debate between the two elders of the inner circle Mdanya and Mtange. Some people are in favor of change but others do not want change.

His Excellency Mhando the leader of Mndika makes changes in the titles of his elders and calls them Elder of Sate for Exceptional Leadership, ESEL. He advises that they should think about the change of titles just like they did with other proposed changes, for example ‘Suja’ to mean servant of the people.

A discussion by the three leaders, Mhando, Mtange and Mdanya, reveal numerous changes that have taken place in Mndika. “Mndika is no longer the land we knew. It’s either drought or floods.... And when it is neither floods nor drought it is trivial debates”.

Change of administration of the shrine from Kadesa to Mgofu Ngoda comes with change of the structure of the shrine. “This is a new-look structure that has replaced the grass-thatched structure of Kadesa’s days”.

Change is necessary for the development of any society. Mgofu tells Mtange and Mnavi that Nderema embraced change a long time ago when women were brought closer to the seat of rule and now the country has gone far in development. “Many will resist change out of ignorance and selfishness”.

In emphasizing the need to embrace change, Mgofu remarks, “change is part of our nature”. It should therefore not be resisted because “the spirit of change is beneath of fresh air”.

### **Leadership**

The playwright explores the theme of leadership, with emphasis on good leadership as a recipe for a peaceful society and development. This is juxtaposed with bad leadership as recipe for chaos.

Mhando is troubled about something and calls his members of the inner circle for a discussion. He asks them question, “What is wrong with us?” To him, all the problems that have afflicted Mndika in the past whose spill over they still feel up to now is bad leadership and poor mindset. “Our people just don’t believe in themselves”.

Mwami Mhando blames the past leaders for acting with impunity, causing great men like Mgofu Ngoda to run into exile in Nderema:

“A time came when our ancestors didn’t only use their mouths to throw words at one another, they soon began to use their hands to fight one another...The great blind seer of Mndika, Mndika’s symbol of well-being as they called him, was forced to go into exile in Nderema”. So, bad leadership forced Mgofu Ngoda into exile.

Mhando is aware that a good leader diagnoses the problem of his society and gets a solution. Having got the problem, he embarks on a mission of bringing back Mgofu Ngoda to Nderema. “Our people will need a strong reminder of where the rain began to beat us; our people will be made to touch the scars of bad governance”. All he wants is to correct the mistakes of the previous leaders, even if there are no benefits of bringing back an old man as Mdanya wants to believe.

Good Leadership is inclusive; it brings everyone who has a role to play on board. Mgofu remarks that Mhando’s idea of bringing women closer to the seat of rule is a welcome idea. “That is surely the future. Nderema took that path several years ago. Now see where they are”.

### **The supernatural**

The play highlights the relationship between the mortals (human beings) and the supernatural world. The supernatural powers are ancestral spirits whose messengers are Thori and Thoriwa.

In Act One, Scene Two, Kadesa in her shrine climbs a mound to hold communion with unseen spirits. Kadesa, Priestess of the shrine is another messenger for the spirits, although she is a human being, unlike Thori and Thoriwa who are already dead but are just spirits.

Thori warns of dire consequences the people of Mndika are likely to face, punishment for the sins of their forefathers, if they do not heed his advice of listening to their leaders. This is testimony to the fact that ancestors have a bearing on the fate of the living.

Mwami Mhando wonders if the jubilation by their neighboring communities when Mndika is in trouble “is because of the one above”. He is wondering whether the supernatural powers (this time he means God) have a hand in Mndika’s problems.

Mgofu Ngoda points to Mhando’s emissaries a fig tree where the sick sit for healing. The tree has spiritual powers because it is where the old blind seer, Mgofu Ngoda is buried, together with his wife Nora. This is also evidence of the supernatural powers that have a bearing on the living.

### **Tradition**

Imbuga also highlights some traditional practices with a view of advocating for doing away with the ones that have become obsolete.

One of the traditional beliefs and practices that have become archaic is one that denies women chance to take leadership positions. Mhando considers making changes to outlaw this. Nderema has already made this change and their country far developed compound to Mndika.

Another traditional practice revealed in the play is one in which the dead are buried quickly after they have died. Mwami Mhando's wife dies and is buried according to tradition. Mgofu does not agree with this traditional. "I don't understand why you in Mndika bury the dead before you mourn them".

Traditionally, there are fourteen days of mourning after the death of an important public figure such as Mhando's wife. This is the reason why Mgofu tells Mhando's emissaries to wait for fourteen days to get his response to their request of gracing the Remembrance Day festivities as chief guest.

### **Forgiveness and reconciliation**

Thori and Thoriwa come from the spiritual world to tell the living about the need for forgiveness and reconciliation. They first narrate how they met their death but now wish the living to co-exist peacefully. "The soiled water can still be distilled to freshness. We believe in forgiveness. Forgive and you shall be forgiven". They believe the mistakes made by their forefathers that culminated into tribal violence can be corrected through forgiveness and reconciliation.

### **Social injustice**

Bizia opposes the idea of Nora (Mgofu Ngoda's wife) giving birth inside the shrine. This is a case of gender discrimination where a pregnant woman, more so, one who is just about to give birth is seen as having the propensity of defiling the sacred place. This calls to mind the fact that women have, over the years, both in African tradition and even in biblical history, been discriminated against, on account of states like having recently given birth, or even being in their menstrual cycle.

### **Revision questions**

- 1 Explain the importance of Mgofu Ngoda's return to Mndika in *The Return of Mgofu*.
- 2 Discuss the character of Mgofu Ngoda in *The Return of Mgofu*.
- 3 What is the importance of Thori and Thoriwa in the play, *The Return of Mgofu*?
- 4 Explain the admirable qualities of Mwami Mhando in *The Return of Mgofu*.

### **Grief Child: Lawrence Darmani**

#### **Introduction**

*Grief Child* is a captivating story of sorrow, pain, anguish, and misery of a young boy whose life is characterized by grief but whose faith in Christianity helps him in overcoming obstacles after losing all of his family members.

Adu, a happy preteen boy lives with his family in Susa, a village located in the South of Ghana. His father is a kind and humble farmer while his mother is a hardworking housewife who sometimes helps her husband on the farm. They are very well cherished by all the villagers. However, in a matter of two months, Adu's life drastically turns upside down as he tragically loses his whole family members. He is forced to move in with his only aunt, who is uncaring and pitiless. He suffers so much in the hands of his aunt to the degree of desiring to end his life. Fortunately, he fails as he remembers what a Christian friend once told him:

"God is able to change even the worst situation to something better. Your father wants you to live; he wants you to live for him. His life is ended but yours is not". So, even though, "The pain in his body was at present as real as his hatred for his aunt. But he wanted to live".

### **Part One**

#### **Chapter 1**

In the village of Susa, in the heart of forest farms at midnight, people are asleep but Adu is wide awake. He hears frightening sounds of a barking dog, a howling dog, hooting owls and sounds of insects. He drifts into sleep and dreams about many voices calling him although he cannot tell

whose voices they are and where they are coming from. The most terrifying of the dreams, however, is of a giant leopard which snarls at him as he runs through the forest of Susa. As the animal tears him limb by limb, in the dream, he shouts, “Papa...mama....she’s killing me...”

He is then woken up by his father, Nimo, who later goes into his room and ponders about the ominous nightmare that portends an impending danger for Adu or the family at large. The nightmare foreshadows trouble because it involves the leopard, a family totem that should not be seeking a family member to kill. Nimo is worried because this dream means that something terrible is about to happen.

## **Chapter 2**

Yaro, a farmhand preacher is in the garden tending to the cocoa plants, cutting the weeds under the young plants. He then thinks about his conversation with Nimo as regards Adu’s dream. Nimo had gone to Yaro and asked him to pray for his son whose nightmare portends bad omen; it means that somebody is going to die. Yaro recalls that he had spent two hours the previous day praying with Adu and reading scriptures to him.

As he continues with the farm work, his mind takes him back home in Wale Wale, a town in the north. He goes down memory lane some thirty years ago when he first came into contact with a missionary who went about preaching and distributing clothes and food, and how this missionary impressed him with his positive attitude towards work. Yaro also remembers the story of the Corn and the Weeds. Just then, Adu’s presence in Yaro’s garden is revealed. He has come to shoot birds. Yaro gives Adu some yams to roast and eat with birds he has shot. He then prays for Adu in his heart, “God. Protect that life; protect that boy from any impending danger”.

## **Chapter 3**

In the morning at Susa. Nimo and his household, including Mahama, their farmhand, prepare to go for their routine farm activities in the swampy area, located two miles away from home, where food crops like rice, maize, cassava, plantain and cocoyam are grown. Adu is excited about the farm work because it is normally crowned with a very exiting hunting expedition which he very much looks forward to, owing to his father’s skill with the gun.

Nimo’s origin is revealed as an Ashanti man from Buama who migrated fourteen years ago and settled in Susa with his wife Birago.

## **Chapter 4**

At the farm, Adu sets fire then joins Nimo and Mahama in the hoeing. Nimo gives him pieces of advice about best practices at the farm: “When you get to the farm..... your first business, if everything is all right, is to tackle what you came to do before the sun heats the soil and your back begins to ache”.

Nimo also tells Adu the value of hard work and the danger of laziness. Adu then recalls the story of the Tree, Squirrel and the lazy Spider that was told to them two nights ago.

Adu asks Nimo why their village is called Susa. Nimo narrates to him the horrifying story of Yeboah and his wife Susa from whom the village derived its name. As he recounts these events to Adu, Nimo thinks about the dreadful happening that normally occur to him after every ten years right from when he was fifteen years. It is now exactly ten years since the catastrophic bushfire swept through his garden, destroying crops and other vegetation. He anticipates something wrong about to happen to him but does not exactly know what it is.



## **Chapter 5**

Nimo's sister, Goma, from Buama pays a visit. She comes along with her daughter, Ama. Nimo is worried that Goma's coming means many unpleasant things, considering that she has been sick and he did not visit her and also the fact that the last time she visited, a year ago, they had quarreled most of the time. There is tension in the house.

On their way back from Buanyo, a neighboring cocoa-growing village on Sunday, Yaro and Adu come conversing on the way. Their experiences in Buanyo village inspire Adu to ask Yaro many questions about the negative attitude that the people of Buanyo portrayed towards Yaro, questions about religious and questions about human suffering. Yaro answers Adu's questions satisfactorily.

## **Chapter 6**

Goma complains about her strained relationship with Nimo. She complains that Nimo has neglected her since their father died. Nimo wonders why his sister is so bitter with him that every time she visits there must be a quarrel. She brings up an issue about events that happened twelve years ago when she disappeared from Buama for three years and only reappeared with a baby. Nimo had quarreled bitterly with her and that is the reason she still keeps a grudge with him. Goma is also bitter with Nimo because he is knowledgeable about herbal medicine but could not do anything for her when she was sick.

Adu inquiries from his mother why Goma and his father are quarreling but Birago dismisses Adu's point of inquiry, insisting that Nimo and his sister are not quarreling.

Birago and Boye's mother (Mame-Adjoa) meet and talk about children like Adu and Boye tagging after their mothers. The closeness between the two women is emphasized by the narrator: "Birago and Boye's mother were friends. They knew how to snatch a brief moment for their small talks, drop in some gossip here and there, laugh aloud, slap their thighs if the joke was a good one, and then run home to continue their chores".

Yeboah visits Susa unexpectedly to check on his tenants and goes to Nimo's home. The next morning Nimo goes to Goma's room and is surprised to find her packing her bag in preparation to leave. Adu wonders why his aunt is leaving in haste and is told that every time she is in Susa and Yeboah comes, she leaves abruptly.

## **Chapter 7**

Appiah, a palm wine tapper and farmer, Boye's father is on his way from the farm. He checks on his gourd of palmwine that he normally hides on a tall tree. As he walks towards his home, he sees Adu, Tanko and Siaka close to his garden trying to reach the oranges his garden. He reports the matter to Nimo in what seems like a quarrel, although Nimo keeps his cool.

Yaa asks their mother a very intriguing question of whether to report to somebody whose item is being stolen. The question makes Adu jittery, perhaps because Yaa had seen him stealing Appiah's oranges. Birago does not respond directly but first tells her that it all depends on the situation and promises to tell them a story later in the evening to explain what she means.

In the evening, as promised, Birago tells them a story (a folktale). She tells them the story of Tortoise, Rope and the Bird. In the story, Rope foresees danger for the singing Bird. But remains aloof and Bird is shot dead as a consequence. By implication, Yaa had seen Adu and his friends trying to pluck Appiah's oranges but did nothing about it and later feels guilt when her father and

Appiah argue about the matter. The moral of the story is the need to be one another's keeper to avoid guilt-conscience.

## **Chapter 8**

Nimo conjures up a concoction of black powder and lemon juice as a herbal remedy to heal Siaka's sprained arm. The boy is held tightly and Nimo smears the medicine on the injured place.

Nimo and Adu go in the bush to look for roots, leaves and tree barks that are medicinal. By going with Adu to look for the herbs, Nimo introduces his son to the world of herbal medicine and cautions him against accepting any form of payment as reward for medicine administered.

A week after administering herbs on Siaka, the boy and his father come to Nimo's home with a present of a cock and as expected, Nimo turns it down, reasoning that "the elders say the left hand washes the right hand and the right washes the left".

Appiah's wife is bitten by a snake. Nimo is sought from his garden to treat her. He runs home to pick his bag of herbs and proceeds to Appiah's house. He cuts the spots of snake bites and applies some herbs on them.

## **Chapter 9**

It is night time in Susa. Torrents are forming for an impending heavy downpour. Lightning and thunder slice through the dark night. The cracking thunder blasts and crashes into the deep forest.

As the droplets begin to hit the rooftops, Birago covers herself in bed. She reflects upon the strained relationship between Nimo and Goma, wondering if there is anything that can be done to right the wrong between the two.

Birago ponders about the prolonged rainy season and the impending flooding which could be catastrophic if the rains continue at the current rate.

Birago hears Yaa talking in her sleep, saying, "They are coming for us". She then says, "They're calling us". Even after Birago has woken and lulled her back to sleep, she continues to sleep-talk, "mother; they're calling you; they say you should come". Yaa insists "Mother, let's go...they're calling us. Shall we go?"

Adu plans to dodge school and go with his father to the farm but his plan is thwarted. He goes to school and Nimo goes to the farm with Mahama.

At home with Yaa, Birago thinks about Yaa's sleep-talking episode. What perturbs her more, however, is the dream she had some time ago. In the dream, she had seen a faceless woman trying to pull Yaa's hands and hair. Yaa had screamed and the faceless woman had let her go but after plucking off a handful of Yaa's hair. As she pictures Yaa's hair in the hands of the faceless woman, she sees the woman moving towards her.

Boye's mother comes when Birago's mind is mingled up with Yaa's sleep- talking episode and her own troubling dream. She screams in fright but later calms down.

## **Chapter 10**

Birago and her daughter Yaa take food for Nimo and Mahama in the farm and plan to go and get firewood after the two men have eaten. On the way, both mother and daughter's minds are preoccupied with thoughts about each other. The daughter wonders why her mother's fear, as depicted in the way she screamed, had coincided with the sudden appearance of Boye's mother. While the mother on the other hand is puzzled with who Yaa saw in her sleep-talk.

Nimo detects something wrong with Birago, owing to her conspicuous silence and sitting posture but she pretends that all is well, except her need for firewood since it is going to rain and another reason she gives for the gloomy facial expression is that she has a headache.

Birago and her daughter gather firewood quickly and get on their way home. A terrible storm forms and is followed by a heavy downpour. A very heavy tree branch breaks and hits them, killing them instantly.

Nimo and Mahama reach home in the rain expecting to find Birago and Yaa already there but they are nowhere to be seen. The two men go back to the farm to look for them but all in vain. They go back home to check if the women have already come back but they find nobody. Other villagers like Appiah and his wife, Yaro among others comb through the nearby paths and bushes. As they search through a path they suspect could have been taken by the two missing women on their way home, Mahama sees a fallen tree branch. When he moves closer to see what is there, he lets out a loud scream. The sight that meets Nimo's eyes causes him to faint.

Adu comes back from school, joking with his friends Boye and Siaka along the way, unaware that it is not business as usual. It does not take long before they hear sounds of people wailing from the direction of their village. It dawns on Adu that his mother and sister are dead.

## **Chapter 11**

Burial has already taken place but Nimo is still grieving the loss of his loved ones. Goma is a round but despite coming a week after she was informed (She comes even after burial has taken place), she wants to go back to her home. Nimo tries to persuade her to stay a little longer but she is adamant.

Yaro, the preacher, comes to Nimo with a message of encouragement and hope. He tells Nimo that life on earth is short and there is need to believe in Christ for protection and everlasting life.

Boye's mother, on her way to the stream, wonders why such a heavy catastrophe had befallen Nimo, a man who has saved several lives in Susa without charge.

Adu sits in Yaro's room and pictures the two graves of his mother and sister, wondering why it had to be his mother and sister. He also wonders why God let the ugly scenario to happen.

Yaro comforts Adu and tries to make him appreciate the situation as God's plan that cannot be understood. He stresses the love of God for Adu. The grieving Adu breaks down and weeps copiously.

## **Chapter 12**

It is two months since the most dreadful thing happened to him. Nimo is trying to heal from the loss. He attempts to go to the farm with his helper Mahama but the latter is not feeling fine. Nimo goes to the rice farm with Adu.

Father and son chase away birds from the rice garden and start walking back home. As they walk on slippery logs in the flooded swampy garden, a flock of birds scare Adu and he loses balance. He falls in the running water but is fortunately saved by Nimo. As Nimo tries to get out, the rotten log snaps and he falls into the water. Nimo drowns helplessly as Adu watches. Adu is devastated since he is now alone and totally orphaned. He faints on Appiah's compound as he goes to inform him of the sad news. Everybody in Susa is speechless. Not even the oldest man in the village can recall such a misfortune that has virtually wiped out an entire family. Yaro, too, is confused about the situation and does not know what to do for Adu.

Goma comes to Susa to organize her brother's funeral. She takes Adu with her back to Buama.

## **Part Two**

### **Chapter 13**

Adu is on the journey to start a new life without his father Nimo, his mother Birago and without his sister Yaa. He is now to live with his aunt, Goma, a woman he fears very much and her daughter, Ama, with whom he does not connect much.

Ama initiates a conversation with Adu to ease the quiet and tense atmosphere. She tells him about her school and the teachers, Miss Beckie Annan and Teacher Ofori who are interesting teachers. The sight of chickens playing about on Goma's compound reminds Adu of Susa. He is assigned a small room where he will be sleeping. Goma pays him a surprise visit in his room and tells him what his duties in the house are, reasoning that she does not like lazy people.

Within six months, Adu has adapted to the new life in Susa. He makes friends at school with Anane who takes him around interesting places in Buama. On one of the evening walks, they end up at the Chief's compound and Goma rebukes him for it.

Adu's fear for Goma is reawakened when she reprimands him for coming back home with a dirty uniform. His troubles are far from over.

### **Chapter 14**

Adu and his cousin Ama arrives at school. They enter their respective classes. In Adu's class, the class prefect is writing names of late comers. One of the learners, Charlie, insists that Adu's name be included on the list of late comers but Anane, the class prefect, is reluctant to do so.

Teacher Ofori enters and is given a list containing names of late comers. He first speaks to the learners about the need to always observe punctuality. He then asks the culprits to cane one another as punishment.

### **Chapter 15**

Adu wakes up with a temporary health inconvenience; he feels a throbbing headache but Goma insists that he goes to the stream to fetch water before going to school. Goma, on the other hand, does not engage her daughter in the fetching of water before school.

Anane comes to pick Adu so they can proceed to school together but Goma lies to him that Adu overslept and he is such a lazy boy that he will be late for school by choice. Anane then calls Ama so that they can go. When Ama comes out, Anane asks her for Adu's whereabouts and Goma is bitter about it. She chases Anane, calling him a "disrespectful boy" for implying that an older person is lying.

That day Adu reaches school late again. Ama is called from her class to explain but she feigns ignorance. Ofori goes ahead to punish Adu. He gives him a portion of the garden to clear at lunch break.

The weekly general Assembly is called. The Headteacher, whose nickname is 'Motorway' because of his bald head, addresses the learners who are excited that the week has ended; they feel set free from the prison of the classroom until Monday. The Headteacher calls them to Attention and at Ease. They sing a song about end of day and beginning of night, followed by the National Anthem and the Lord's Prayer. After making some announcements and reading marks for the week's good performance or wrong doing, Assembly is dismissed. Adu goes to the school garden to serve his punishment.

The romantic scene which follows is breathtaking. Beckie Annan packs her books to go home but lingers awhile. She rests her head on the table and starts thinking about love. Having discouraged many teachers who make love proposals to her, she finds Ofori irresistible; he had entered her heart with ease. She ponders about their college tutor's assertion that "Love is a thing of the heart" she concludes that love is a thing of both the heart and the mind.

The utterance that comes out of her loud thoughts about love that "it makes sense" sets the pace for the two lovebirds. Ofori who has been standing by the door asks Beckie to elaborate as he enters inside the room to where Beckie is seated. They look at each other romantically in silence and without blinking. Beckie's eyes begin to water with tears of love and she sheds some droplets. Ofori sees love in Beckie's eyes and calls her name. Beckie stands up and suggests that they go. Ofori holds her hands and they walk silently to the end of the block.

Ofori is surprised that Adu is still around. He tells him to go home.

Beckie asks Ofori why he wanted to see her. Ofori answers that he wanted to see her and has seen her, he impresses it upon her that it is always good to see her. Beckie looks at him and smiles. Ofori becomes nervous and Beckie asks him to tell her something but Ofori feels shy.

## **Chapter 16**

Thieves break into the chief's graveyard and steal gold ornaments and other precious valuables. An announcement is passed through the crier to appeal to citizens to give information that may lead to the recovery of the stolen items and arrest of the culprits. A reward is promised.

During the communal Labor Day, Anane is bitten by a snake. Adu goes into the school garden and gets some herbs which he uses to heal Anane. In appreciation, Anane's mother brings some money to Goma to thank Adu. To Goma's surprise, Adu rejects the money. A disagreement brews up between him and Goma about the traditional practice of accepting payment for healing. Goma beats up Adu until he bleeds. Ama soothes him and cleans up the blood on his body.

At night, Adu dreams about a leopard about to tear him up into pieces but he is only saved by his friend Yaro who falls upon him. The animal spits fire and changes into a human being he knows, his aunt. She smiles and Adu sees her tongue sticking out. She gets hold of him by force and he shouts while trying to free himself. He screams alone in his room and runs to the door. He opens and finds his aunt standing there. He quickly closes it. Ama inquires what has happened and he tells her everything about the dream. Ama is surprised.

## **Chapter 17**

Adu's hatred for Goma intensifies. He contemplates killing her but gives up the idea when he thinks about his friend Yaro.

He looks at the wounds on his bruised body then thinks about his dead parents and sister who are resting peacefully in death. He thinks the only solution to his wicked aunt and his troubles is death. He goes to the railway line so that a train can run over him but his mission fails as the train does not come. He gets another idea of going to dive into the Buama River and drown beneath it but while there, Yaro appears in his mind to give him hope. He abandons the idea of suicide.

Mentally, physically and emotionally fatigued, Adu sleeps off. He wakes up much later to find himself in pitch darkness. As he finds his way back home, he sees a flash light from a touch and hears two men talking. Of the two men, one man's voice is familiar. The two men have gold they are hiding. After they have gone, a voice encourages Adu to take the gold and become rich, purporting it is a gift from his father but Adu is reluctant to take the gold because it would be theft. As he squats to feel the warmth of the freshly dug soil, Yaro appears in his mind to thwart the temptation as he reminds Adu about plucking Appiah's oranges without his permission. Adu abandons the idea of taking the gold and run away towards the town.

The brutality that Anane had witnessed meted by Goma on Adu compel him to reveal Goma's secret to Adu. In Adu's room, Anane requests Ama to excuse them; she reluctantly leaves the room. Anane tells Adu a secret he had heard from his mother about Goma as an act of revenge for Goma's heartlessness and brutality against Adu. The secret is too shocking to be true.

## **Chapter 18**

Adu has moved from the primary into the middle school and Teacher Ofori does not teach him anymore but is still his close friend. Adu tells him about the two men he heard in the bush and the stolen gold from the chief's graveyard. He reveals the familiar voice he heard was for Teacher Afram. Ofori finds this incredible.

Adu also tells Ofori about the dream of a leopard chasing him and later it turns into a human being (his aunt). Ofori tells him this is a spiritual battle between powers of darkness (the Leopard) and the powers of light (Yaro) and only those who are in Christ win this battle.

Motorway, the Headteacher, and Ofori discuss the best way of handling Afram's case without the public hearing it. They agree to inform the Chief, and then secretly keep watch over the spot until they can catch Afram and his accomplice red-handed. But first, they have to check to be sure that Adu is saying the correct thing.

The trio, Motorway, Adu and Ofori, at the chief's palace meet the chief's linguist whom they brief about their mission. The linguist offers to give them his men to go and check where the items are buried to confirm if they are there and guard the place so that the thieves are caught when they come to pick the items.

Ofori goes to Beckie's house for their appointment. He finds Beckie has waited for long and is irritated. He enters but she pretends not to have seen him. He holds her waist and proposes marriage. She sits down quietly instead of responding to his proposal. Ofori explains the reason for late coming and Beckie apologizes, saying she had lost temper because of Ofori's late coming and non-communication about his delay to come on time. She accepts Ofori's proposal.

Afram and his accomplice are paraded at the chief's compound, being led to the guardroom. On the day of judgment, the thieves plead guilty to the crime. The linguist communicates to the people in a fully packed courtroom that the chief and his elders have agreed to hand the matter over to police.

### **Chapter 19**

Adu ponders how to break the news to Ama that Goma is not her biological mother but does not have the nerve. At last he lets the cat out of the bag. Ama is puzzled and runs to Mansa to confirm. Mansa places her palm on her mouth and Ama gets the message loud and clear. She goes back home to face Goma, she breaks down and weeps bitterly. Goma promises to explain everything to Ama.

### **Chapter 20**

The news about Ama's identity spreads through Buama town like bush fire. Everybody, including school children now know that Goma is not Ama's mother. Many people ask Ama to tell them the truth but she, too, does not know. She is devastated with the public reaction to the news. Her only comfort is Adu who tells her Yaro's message of hope that "God can turn bad things into good ones".

Appiah suddenly comes to Buama. He meets Adu and Ama. His coming relieves Ama's distress a little. He reveals that Mahama and Yaro are no longer in Susa; they went back to their places in the north. Appiah expresses interests in taking Adu to stay with him in Susa but Goma totally rejects the idea and openly tells Appiah that he does not know what he is talking about. Appiah learns about the news of Ama's identity and proceeds to Mansa's home to verify; he confirms the rumors that Goma is not Ama's mother as true.

Left with no choice, Goma tells Ama the whole story of her life which she kept secret for fourteen years. In the story, Goma and her friend Mansa were itinerant traders who dealt in beads and traditional bangles. Goma was a childless woman who always wanted a child but had failed to get one. One day there was an accident and a woman, Susa died, leaving her two-months-old baby who miraculously survived the accident. Goma and Mansa hatched a plan and Goma took on the baby as her own child and named her Ama.

### **Chapter 21**

Appiah comes back to Buama with Yeboah to claim Ama from Goma. The matter is taken to the chief's court and it is resolved that Ama goes with her father Yeboah. Ama, however, is uncertain about what awaits her in a strange place with strange people. She wishes to go with Appiah back to Susa where his heart is.

Ofori has been transferred from Buama. This is heartbreaking news for Adu who had found solace in Ofori. Adu asks Ofori to tell the Chief to grant his wish to go with Appiah to Susa since the Chief would wish to reward Adu for his heroic deed in retrieving the Chief's treasure.

### **Chapter 22**

Ofori approaches the Chief's linguist to prevail over Goma to grant Adu's wish. In addition to granting Adu's wish, the Chief buys him presents to take with him.

The boy looks handsome on some of his new clothes. The school organizes a farewell party for Adu and Ama.

The moment of departure evokes painful emotions as Adu bids his teachers, Ofori and Beckie goodbye. Ofori promises to continue being of help to Adu and even gives him their new address. Ofori also informs him that he will get married to Beckie in three months' time and promises to see him off at the train station.

Ama helps Adu to pack his belongings in readiness to depart. Separating from each other becomes a tall order for the two youngsters who had grown to love each other deeply. They shed the last tears for each other before suddenly falling into each other's arms in a long farewell hug. Many people, including Ofori and Beckie, see them off at the station.

### **Chapter 23**

In Susa, Adu is welcomed warmly by Boye, Boye's mother and other residents of Susa. He finds Susa has greatly changed; it now looks much smaller than the Susa he knew; it is also quiet even at full moon yet in the past boys and girls played all kinds of games in the moonlight. He finds all friends gone.

A visit to the old family house evokes painful memories in Adu. He sobs uncontrollably and cries at his mother's door. He soon realizes he made a big mistake to come back to Susa because he cannot live in it any longer. The only way of trying to forget his family is to be away. He plans to unceremoniously run away from Susa very early in the morning. He asks Boye to tell his parents.

He reaches Buama and finds Ofori and Beckie packing their belongings to leave. They are surprised to see him but are willing to take him along to stay with him.

### **Chapter 24**

Now at Nsupa. The married couple, Beckie and Ofori agrees to treat Adu as their first born. Adu's pain has lessened for the six months he has stayed with this couple.

Ama writes to Adu about life in Abenase; she informs him that she is fine and that her father and step mother are proud to have her.

Ama convinces Adu to realize that it is not only his aunt who has wronged him but he too has wronged her. Ofori further talks to Adu about the need to admit one's wrong and seek forgiveness but on condition that one forgives those who have wronged him. Adu agrees to go to Buama to meet Goma and beseech her to forgive him as he also forgives her. He also requests that they proceed to Abenase after Buama to check on Ama and her family. Ofori grants this request.

In Buama, Mansa leads the trio, Adu, Mr. and Mrs. Ofori to Goma for Adu to interface with her. Goma thinks the couple has prepared for Adu what to tell her because they think she is to die soon since she has been sick. Adu confesses his bitterness against Goma and asks her for forgiveness. Goma sheds some tears and Adu feels relieved.

At abenase, Yeboah and his family of two children and a wife welcome the visitors. Adu and Ama exchange pleasantries and chat about how they have coped at their respective homes. Ama, however reveals that although she is with her father she feels she is a stranger and that it is Goma's place where she belongs.



### **Epilogue (conclusion)**

Eleven years later, one Sunday evening under the starlit sky, shortly after dusk, Adu and Ama take a stroll along a lonely street, appreciating God's creations up in the sky.

Adu is now a school teacher at Abenase while Ama is a Secretary at the Ministry of Health in Abenase. Adu reminisces the bitterness he has passed through and is glad to have overcome all the moments of grief.

Adu and Ama thank God for all the people who have been there for them through the difficult times: Ofori, Beckie, Yeboah, Ama's stepmother, Yaro and all the others not mentioned.

Adu declares his undying love for Ama and proposes marriage. Ama accepts without hesitation because she loves Adu very much.

### **Thematic concerns in *Grief Child***

**Grief** is one of the central themes in the novel, *Grief Child*.

#### **Light versus darkness/goodness versus evil**

In the novel, the two antagonistic forces of light and darkness/goodness versus evil are at our play in Adu's life. Forces of darkness (evil) struggle to claim his life but light (goodness) preserves him in the end.

#### **Love**

There are different kinds of love depicted in the novel.

These include filial/parental love, friendship love, romantic love and agape love/love for humanity.

#### **Culture and tradition**

This is the total sum of a people's way of life as portrayed through their beliefs, practices and customs. Examples of these in *Grief Child* include storytelling, the value of work, communal life, burying dead chiefs with gold ornaments, communal labor day, hunting, law and order, traditional healing through herbs and superstition.

- Hope/ Optimism
- Betrayal
- Injustice

#### **• Character and characterization**

##### **Adu**

- He is the protagonist, the hero of the novel. The son of Nimo and Birago, nephew to Goma, brother to Yaa and a friend to many characters, including his teachers Ofori and Beckie Annan. By the end of the novel he is a qualified teacher and married to Ama. His childhood is characterized by many episodes of grief hence the title grief child.
- He is a good hunter, just like his father Nimo.
- Adu is a flexible character
- The author depicts Adu as an inquisitive boy.
- The boy is very observant/alert/sharp-eyed.
- The character of Adu is also adaptive
- There is no doubt that Adu is a friendly character.
- He is a respectful boy
- Besides the above, Adu is also portrayed as a fearless and courageous young man.

- **Nimo**

- He is a hardworking farmer and a renowned herbalist in Susa.
- He is portrayed as a superstitious character.
- He is a liberal/open-minded character
- The character of Yaro is also portrayed as calm.
- He is a selfless character who deprives his own wife of a sewing machine and buys it for his sister who unfortunately demeans his humble gesture.
- In addition, he is a generous character.
- He is a forgiving character
- The novelist depicts Nimo as a wise man.
- Another important trait in Nimo worth nothing is being sharp-eyed/observant.
- Nimo is also portrayed as a character who is concerned. He is disturbed in the way his wife is conspicuously silent when she takes for him food in the garden. Her sitting posture “on a piece of wood, head in hand and wearing a strange and melancholy expression”. He is compelled to ask her if anything is the matter. “Is anything worrying you? Nimo asked, looking directly at his wife”.

**Goma**

- This is Nimo’s sister, Adu’s aunt, Ama’s mother; Mansa’s friend who was a trader. She lives in Bvama. She is a portrayed negatively to be detested.
- She is a jealous woman
- Goma is depicted as an ingrate.
- Goma’s pitiless/insensitive trait is depicted when Nimo sends her a message about the deaths of his wife and daughter and she arrives a week after burial had already taken place.
- In addition, she is discriminative.
- Another outstanding character trait
- Goma’s rudeness is shown she is cornered by Anane for telling lies about Adu.
- She is also a brutal woman hell-bent to brutalize Adu.

## **THE POOR CHRIST OF BOMBA: MONGO BETI**

### **About the book**

Set in the early 1930s against the Cameroonian background during the era of French colonization, the story follows the life of a young boy named Denis.

*The Poor Christ of Bomba* is a stark revelation of the deception, hypocrisy, blasphemy and moral decadence that characterizes the Bomba—a small village set in the colonial Cameroon, microcosmic of Africa, brimming with Catholic missionaries.

In the heart of the story is a Father, a reverend Father; and at first the Father had a genuinely good intention. And that is: to transform the bestial nature of the African into the civilized ways and manners of the white Europeans. Then the father gets it all wrong. Since the new practices are alien to the people, they would never deem it necessary to be part of it, this strange religion. In fact, the whole idea of Father's approach to Christianity is intriguing to the natives.

The central point in the novel is the sixa, a place reserved and designed for the grooming of young girls until they are ripe for marriage. Such practice is strongly ridiculed and condemned by Mongo Beti, because (to him, as deeply expressed in the novel) it opens the door of promiscuity and all sort of sexual vices to the people – the innocent young men and women of Bomba. Their girls delight in opportunity open to them through sex. For them, it appears the only remedy to their plight; sex, then, becomes for them a means of escape. If there is any strong factor responsible for the sixa girls' sexual degradation, it is their unjustifiable exposure to hard labour; as if they were mere slaves, they are exposed to all kinds of forced duties. In this way, therefore, their uncalled for sexual acts is a sort of escape, from boredom, from slavery, and from bondage (sexual and spiritual).

### **The title**

On the very first page, Denis, the 15-year-old narrator, says that according to his father, Jesus Christ and Drumont are one and the same. The book's title probably refers to the priest, though it could be an ironic commentary on the collapse of the Bomba mission.

### **Plot summary**

#### **The First Part**

##### **The Catholic Mission of Bomba Sunday, 1<sup>st</sup> February 193-**

Father Drumont has likeness to Jesus Christ: "same beard, same sauterne, same cord around the waist" the children cried out. "But Jesus Christ is just like the Father. And since then all the boys of my village call the Father 'Jesus Christ'.

Father Drumont is intolerant to people who are not attentive during mass. He is unhappy with those who sit down when they are supposed to be standing up or standing when they should be kneeling. He drags a woman along b her left arm. He pulls her before the table and forces her down on her knees. He then climbs the pulpit casting heavy glances all around the church. He does not start the summon until there is complete silence in the church, "Yes, I'm waiting. Some day perhaps you will stop coughing, and then I will be able to begin my sermon.

He tells the congregation that he is leaving Bomba for Tala country on a mission to redeem the people from their sins. "The good shepherd leaves his flock to go in search of a lost lamb."

At the mission, the inmates of the sixa are compelled to do manual labour for more than ten hours every day.

Zacharia leaves Anatole to do the cooking alone while he spends his time drinking palm-wine or arguing with the brick layers and carpenters. If not, then where the girls of the sixa are working. He only works when the Bishop comes to the mission.

### **Mombet, first stage Monday 2nd February**

At Mombet, Father Drumont is very disappointed in the people. He questions the local catechist for long hours about the behavior of the people. The people have behaved very badly in the last three years that the father has not come around. He says he abandoned them for their own good. He finds that many of the converts have taken a second or even a third wife. Only little children still come for catechism on Wednesday meetings. The whole place is rotten. No one but only older women now pays the church dues. The more money people have, the less they think about God. For this immorality, Father Drumont wishes that God sends a sign to these people to bring them into the right path, a general misfortune or something terrible which will teach the people the hard way.

Later that day at around four o'clock, the Father begin to hear confessions of some few people and begins home visits. He visits an old lady, a real Christian too ill to get up. His second visit of the day turns out dramatic. He visits a woman with many children whose polygamist husband had never been baptized. The woman's husband warns him sternly and orders him to vanish immediately.

### **Timbo, Tuesday 3rd February**

What local people of Timbo think about religion in Timbo shocks Father Drumont. The people think the whites are holding something. They say the priest is no better than a Greek trader or any other colonialist. They say all of them are after money; the whites are not sincere with the natives. The whites live in concubinage with loose women in the town and the priest never says anything about it. He instead shakes hands with the, goes to their parties and rides in their cars back to Bomba. The people think Father Drumont's preaching that after baptism the blacks should cease to visit their own relatives who are not Christian is unacceptable. They think Father Drumont is a very dangerous man who once listened to would cause wives to leave their husbands, the children would no longer obey their fathers, brothers would not know another and everything would be upside down: in short, Father Drumont preaches a message of disunity, instead of the Christian message of love and unity.

A man comes complaining to Father Drumont that he confiscated his wife who has in the sixa in Bomba yet he had paid seven thousand francs as her dowry. Father Drumont dismisses this claim of the man having married the woman, reasoning that "a civil marriage counts for nothing, if it is not completed by the sacrament". The man wants his wife back since she has already spent four months at the sixa and worked for free all the time. The Father slaps the man and sends him out of the chapel. He literary runs after him in annoyance.

Father Drumont reprimands an old woman for defaulting on paying her Easter offering for the last four years. In response, she tells him about her advanced age that cannot allow her to work and get money to pay cult dues. She asks Father for a dispensation to take confessions and other sacraments without paying cult dues since she is very old and too poor to afford. Father instead advices her to look for some relatives to pay off her dues, instead of faking poverty.

A man, Joseph Garba, who had an accident in the garden, comes writhing in pain to be prayed for. Instead of helping him urgently, Father Drumont first asks him to confess and swear that if he survived he would give up his 'outside' women and pay up all his arrears to the cult. The man unfortunately dies as the Father is giving his absolution. The whole village is in mourning and

Father Drumont explains to them that men need misfortune like this to bring home to them the instability and unreality of the things of his world.

### **Kota, Wednesday 4th February**

The journey to Kota reveals natural beauty as revealed by Denis, the narrator. He talks about the endless forest with its howling chimpanzees, its owls which screech even in daylight, its deep river that is crossed with rope-bridges. It is simply a beautiful place.

Father Drumont is welcomed by the Administrator, Monsieur Vidal who tells him the challenges he has met as an apostle in Kota. He says, "Evangelizing the blacks is like taking an old water jug and trying to turn it into an amphora". Drumont consoles him that it might be even worse in Islamic countries like Egypt. He tells Father another challenge of poor means of communication and poor road network. There is a plan to construct a road right through the Tala country.

### **Bitie, Thursday 5th February**

The mission to Bitie turns out as the most successful of all; Father Drumont is given presents and treated to the best hospitality since leaving Bomba mission. He is given three sheep, plenty of eggs and chickens, a hundred kilos of cocoa and the people are very friendly.

The people here readily accept Christianity and Christian marriage and send their fiancés to the sixa for three months but what is strange is that they take a second wife after the marriage ceremony. At the very altar and in the midst of the service, they are already thinking about their next choice, have already negotiated with the parents and paid part of the bride price. The Father has no problem with the men having second wives since they have at least had a proper marriage with the first one.

Since the men usually send their extra children for baptismal, Father normally writes on their baptismal records that their fathers are polygamous and that's why they must pay a higher fee.

It is surprising how people in Bitie are deeply rooted in sorcery. Here, no one is even supposed to die from natural causes; it has to be linked to witchcraft. Even the best Christian makes use of sorcerers. The people here take pride in the service of Sanga Boto, the man-with-the-mirror, the witch-doctor who has turned many people from God.

### **Evindi, Friday 6th February**

Life is miserable for Father Drumont in Evindi. The people here hold him in low regard. He now thinks about his own country and family back in Europe.

Everything is rotten in Evindi. There is not even a catechist, the presbytery is empty and sunk in grass. Everything is in a neglected state. The catechist has gone back to his village, saying that the Father did not pay him enough. The catechist supposed to labour for the love of God abandons duty on account of no payment.

Father Drumont comes across a group of people singing and dancing traditional song and dance outside the chief's house. The Father scatters the xylophones into pieces. He lifts the drums and throws them down. The chief comes and confronts the father, almost assaulting him physically but is restrained by his Father.

Zacharia gets a woman to sleep with that night in a room only a few meters from the father. The woman's cries are heard all the time and the bed creaks ceaselessly. Denis wonders what Zacharia

is doing with the woman to make the bed creak. He wonders why she keeps suppressing cries, instead of lying peacefully.

### **Ekokot, Saturday 7th February.**

Denis reveals that Ekokot is to be made into a big mission, like Bomba and a black priest; Abbe Jean Bita is to be in charge. Abbe is said to have performed some miracles. One day he rebuked a man for his neglect of the virtue of chastity. The man answered him insolently and he punished the man by declaring that he would sleep in the forest that night and it happened. In another case, Abbe had found some girls bathing in the nude and punished them by commanding that they stay for two days in that river exactly as they were then, naked and upright. It happened as he had commanded.

A woman comes to Father Drumont and he accuses her of doing nothing when a young man who wanted to marry her daughter was forced to pay out five thousand francs. The woman tells the Father how society subjugates women and so they are never consulted on such matters since children only belong to women while in their bellies.

She tells Father, in a flashback, how the whole business was transacted. The decision had been made in the men's house and the bride price had been determined without involving the girl in question or her mother. She was only called to be told to look at the man who would be her husband from then on.

The girl Zacharia slept with the previous night is again here in Bitie. She is described to depict beauty. She has fine breasts: When she laughed the skin of her cheeks fell into tiny dimples and her eyes blazed with a strange brilliance. Her skin was so fine that she looked like someone who spends her whole life bathing; not even a single scab, not a tattoo-scar. And her hands were so soft and small that obviously she seldom worked with them.

Father Drumont visits the village chief. The chief's room is fine, with big cane chairs, long wooden tables...and a high bamboo ceiling. It has two weird photographs on the wall. The pictures of a naked man holding his hernia in both hands. In the second picture, the same naked man holds his long, slim penis between his fingers. The father gazes at them but says nothing. Father asks him when he converts to Christianity and he responds that he would do so when he has produced many children.

The Monitor of Ekokot tells Father Drumont about Sanga Boto and his trickery. They conclude that in the end people will discover Sanga Boto's emptiness and tricks. The monitor tells Father how Sanga Boto came to be called man-of-the-mirror and Father Drumont is awed by the Monitor's narrative skills.

### **Ekokot, Sunday 8th February**

Still in Ekokot, Father Drumont and his team sail across a river on a canoe. There is an accident and Father lands into the water. The ferryman rescues him and he develops a fever shortly after. He soon recovers.

Father Drumont comes face to face with Sanga Boto. He challenges Sanga Boto to reveal his tricks, which he does. Sanga Boto explains many things admitting that he or one of his assistants would hide an evil fetish under someone's threshold or between two thatches of his roof, so that the sorcerer could later find it with a great display of triumph. Sanga Boto apologizes and even reveals

his Christian name, Ferdinand. He even says the Lord's Prayer, a sign of his complete emptiness as a sorcerer.

## **The Second Part**

### **Ndimi, Monday 9th February**

Denis feels ashamed and is unhappy with Catherine. He wishes his mother were around to console him at this difficult moment when his spirit is on the down low, courtesy of Catherine.

He narrates in details how Catherine had entered his room the previous night, teased him about being scared of her, re-assured him that he had nothing to worry about and started playing games with him on his bed. He explains how Catherine romanced him, sexually aroused him and inserted his sex organ into hers and started riding on him to and from until he reached orgasm.

The effect of the sexual encounter weighs heavily on Denis. He feels exhausted and sleeps off. He says, "And perhaps I had really died and been revived by a miracle". He is too ashamed to look Father Drumont straight in the face. He is too frightened to serve in the mass. Father now looks differently to him, "he was as white as sheet". When Father Wears a black Soutine in the sacristy, Denis is worried even the more. He feels Father is to reproach him during mass about his sex escapade the previous night. He even fails to take Holy Communion.

Two Monitors come to report the sudden disappearance of Sanga Boto at night with all his wives, court and wealth. Sanga Boto spreads news that he had engineered the boat accident for Father Drumont to give him a little sample of his powers. The monitor says Sanga Boto claims that he just forgave Father Drumont, fearing that Vidal, the administrators might throw him in prison because he was more frightened of Vidal than the Father, who was just another sorcerer like himself.

On the way to Ndimi, Father Drumont rides ahead of Zacharia and Denis. The two young men meet Catherine and she welcomes them into a house. She offers them palm-wine but Denis is hesitant to drink it. He is guilty of having sex with Zacharias' girl last night but now wishes for more. He hopes an accident could happen so that he and Catherine finds themselves alone in his bed at night; he would do what he did the previous night – this time without fear. Denis looks at Catherine and yearns to have sex with her in broad day night in order to see her naked body, her breasts, her buttocks and her sexual organ with its little bush of hair.

Several people come to confess but half of them have not paid their cult dues and the Father chases them off, shouting at them to go and confess to the devil.

### **Ziba, Tuesday 10th February**

Just as Father Drumont prepares to administer confession to people but still talking to the catechist in his house, a mob is heard crying and shouting, chasing after a man called Gono. Two men among the crowd, Bimbo and Abo tell Gono to stop but he continues to run, waving a spear with an immensely long handle. The pursuers catch up with Gono and hurl themselves upon him. They break his spear into pieces and throw the broken pieces into the bush.

Gono sets himself free from the crowd and finds a way of hurling himself at the Father, like a boar, butting his head against the priest's brow with a sharp crack, sending the priest crashing into the dust. The catechist leads the priest into the house while people get hold of Gono. Zacharia beats him up thoroughly.

Zacharia talks about the people's perception about the whites and religion in this country of Taba. The people have a negative attitude towards the whites; they detest them. The Father still has to do a lot to win the people of Tala at all costs; they are still obstinate. They claim that there is no difference between a Greek trader and a priest, even one like Father Drumont. For evidence, they point to the wealth of the Catholic missions, all the presents which Father collects and all the cult dues. They say the Father is as greedy a tax-collector as The Administrator.

Zacharia further tells Father that the people of Ziba have faith in Sanga Boto who says he has been charged by the ancestors to struggle against the whites. This explains why an attempt on the Father's life can be dared in broad day light as occasioned by Gono.

Zacharia shamelessly sends the catechist to a nearby village to Catherine, "a smashing girl with splendid legs and eyes... and what tits". He sends the catechist to inform her that he would go himself in the evening to find her at his friend Mbo's place. The catechist wonders why a man spends his days besides the Father who is almost treated as a saint or a martyr is instead very close to Hell. He says Zacharia is like one of the bad angels.

The Administrator, Vidal, come to inform Father that the fellow who nearly killed him (Gono) has been arrested and is at the sub-division prison right now. Father Drumont is, however, not amused by the development.

#### **Akamba, Wednesday 11th February**

Denis feels feverish and has lost appetite for food. As he serves mass at Zibi, just before they depart for Akamba, he is tormented by the sexual act he had with Catherine. He wants to confess but not to Father Drumont, at least to Jean-Martin. He is too ashamed to face Father Drumont. He serves mass but with guilt.

On the way from Zibi, Father mounts his bicycle and rides ahead of Zacharia and Denis. The two boys find Catherine waiting in the last hamlet before Akamba. She looks pretty, so charming and smells so nice. She is interested in both Zacharia and Denis. When Zacharia goes out to piss, Catherine engages in romantic gestures with Denis. "Once Zacharia went out to piss and Catherine came over to kiss my check. After that, every time he went to piss, I crossed over to Catherine and kissed her checks, her neck and her eyes. She smelt so nice. Once she took me in her arms and squeezed me in her firm breasts and I began panting because she smelt so sweet". Later at night Denis hears Catherine and Zacharia bouncing on the bed.

#### **Teba, Thursday 12th February**

Denis meets Clementine who is very bitter with him. She is furious because Denis has been watching and enjoying what Zacharia has been doing with Catherine, a girl from the sixa. Clementine is annoyed that all this happens without Father Drumont's knowledge yet Denis should have told him about it.

Denis is now tormented even the mere. He has been grappling with guilt and need to confess and now something more catastrophic comes up. He cannot imagine what Father will do when he gets to learn that Zacharia has been sleeping with a girl from the sixa throughout the tour. The most upsetting thing to Denis in this saga is Raphael's involvement. To Denis, Raphael must have noticed Catherine's disappearance, especially as he calls a roll every morning if he did not permit her to come along on the tour. It will even be worse if Raphael is in league with Zacharia on the matter of Catherine moving with them. What will happen if Father gets to know about it all still remains to be seen?



**Kondo, Friday 12th February**

Hell breaks loose. The hidden secret is revealed and there is pandemonium as mass is disrupted. Denis is speechless.

Clementine beats up Catherine thoroughly in full view of all people who had come for mass. She shouts loud enough for everyone to hear, explaining why she has beaten Catherine: “She’s...from...the sixa!..she’s sleeping....with ...My ...husband. Yes...she comes from the sixa!...and she’s sleeping with my husband...for a whole week now!.... I swear... for a whole week... under your very eyes!”

Zacharia runs away. Father Drumont calls Catherine and Clementine aside for questioning. Clementine narrates how the whole affair between Catherine and Zacharia has started at the mission back in Bomba as Catherine “acted like a bitch on heat...” she reveals that on several occasions she had found Catherine in the Father’s kitchen for no reason and started suspecting something dirty going on. She also reveals that when Zacharia left Bomba on a tour with Father, Catherine disappeared, with help from Raphael the caretaker at sixa. For the entire period of the tour, Zacharia and Catherine had been sleeping together until; Clementine could not tolerate.

It is Catherine’s turn to speak and she accepts all the accusations leveled against her by Clementine. She reveals how she had been sleeping with Zacharia at Bomba mission, with connivance of Raphael. Father Drumont orders the catechist to give Catherine a thrashing. The order is executed and Catherine is lashed several strokes of the cane. The Father then charges the catechist with the responsibility of taking back the two girls to Bomba and ensures that they do not fight again.

On the way between Teba and Kondo, Zacharia is seen sitting in a house. Denis tells him everything that happened and he is annoyed that Catherine was lashed. He wishes it were Clementine instead who was beaten for fighting her husband’s little friend who was just a unmarried girl. He concludes that everything between him and Catherine was far from finished.

The dialogue between Father Drumont and Zacharia reveals that it is normal traditionally for a man to sleep with another woman, provided the woman in question is unmarried. Zacharia gives an excuse that his wife had just given birth and he could not wait for a long period of time before resuming to have sex with her. to him, there was absolutely nothing wrong about sleeping with Catherine.

**Kouma, Saturday 14th February**

Denis confesses his sins and feels free of guilt. He narrates the circumstances that lead to his confession. Father had pulled a chair and called Denis for a talk. He persuades Denis that he is Christ-like and can pardon Denis if he confesses. He cajoles Denis into telling him everything. He calls him “little one” and promises to forgive him. Denis tells Father everything in fine details without hesitation of difficulty. Father advises him to have nothing to do with women and make sure they never come near him. He gives Denis absolution and tells him to cry no more since his sins have been forgiven.

On the way from Kondo to Kouma, Father Drumont rides ahead of Zacharia and Denis. A man bursts out of one of the houses and violently confronts Zacharia. A fierce fight ensues. “The man seized Zacharias fly-buttons, groped inside and did something that made Zacharia howl like a wild beast and squirm in agony”. Zacharia is punished for sleeping with Catherine and is warned

thoroughly, “Just remember that sixa girls are not put there for your pleasure”. Father Drumont learns about Zacharia’s predicament but cannot do much about it since the perpetrator ran away.

### **Catholic Mission of Bomba, Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> February.**

Back at Bomba Catholic Mission, Denis speaks to Daniel who tells him what he has heard about the tour. He tells him about someone who nearly killed the Father.” Clementine had a fight with little Catherine over Zacharia... Zacharia was beaten by Catherine’s fiancé.” Denis is worried that his sexual encounter with Catherine has also been talked about but Daniel does not talk about it among the things he has heard from the tour.

M. Vidal comes and Father Drumont tells him about his journey back to Europe, never to return to Bomba since he has failed in his mission. He tells M. Vidal his frustrations caused by imposing foreign customs upon people who hitherto cherished their customs, for example eating one another, dancing in the moonlight and wearing back charms around their necks. M.Vidal is first shocked at Drumont’s revelations but also makes a sterning observation. “The condemnation you have just pronounced extends to us also, we colonialists and officials, heirs of Faidherbe and the great Savorgnan de Brazza. For if the Christian religion doesn’t make sense here, it must be admitted that the civilization we’re seeking to implant is an absurdity under the tropical sun”. The dialogue between the two priests reveals the purpose of both missionaries and colonialists as pursuit for their own selfish interests.

The experience Father Drumont has had for the last twenty years at Bomba has a negative connotation on colonialism. He has witnessed colonialism characterized by forced labour, conscription floggings, and arbitrary imprisonment. What has surprised him most is the way the local people react; they appear docile. This docility worries him because they could burst out with rage any time. The best for him to do under the circumstances is to leave. He had began detecting resistance. “The resistance was especially sharp in the country where we are now, the Tala country.” He had tried to bring back the people of Tala to Christ but to no avail, hence the frustration and need to leave Bomba. He addresses the catechists and monitors in his farewell speech.

### **The third part**

#### **Bomba, Monday 16<sup>th</sup> February**

Zacharia runs away from Bomba. Earlier on, he had taken Catherine to his house without the knowledge of his wife, Clementine. They found her in the house and Zacharia beat her until she bled. She then runs to the mission to report to the Father the matter. Father Drumont sends for Zacharia who vehemently refuses to go, saying, “I’ve had enough! I won’t be mucked about anymore by anyone. I’ve had enough of this blessed prison and I’m clearing out. As for Clementine she can hang herself whenever she finds a good hook! Let her not dare to follow me”.

Father Drumont sends for Catherine who comes and is whipped by Anatole. Father asks her to reveal all that had happened between her and Clementine and tell the details of how her affairs with Zacharia had began and ended up. She makes interesting revelations which involve other sixa girls like Monica, Zacharias’ former lover at sixa, and Marguerite Anaba.

Marguerite Anaba is sent for questioning but she becomes insolent and is slashed twenty stokes of the cane to straighten her up. She explains why she has spent one year at the sixa and why her marriage was delayed. She first becomes hesitant to reveal everything but after another thrashing, she reveals all the rot in the sixa, all the girls sleep with someone or another. Syphilis is spread from one girl to another. Men pay money to Raphael to supply them with girls to sleep with.

Raphael sleeps with all the sixa girls. Many sixa girls are impregnated on the eve of their marriages. These revelations shock the priests. The Vicar says, "I'm certain nothing like this ever happens in the Father's own country..."

### **Bomba, Tuesday 17th February**

Daniel, the Number One Boy, and Raphael flee the mission to evade interrogation, following Marguerite Anaba's revelations that exposed their feasting on the sixa girls.

A thorough search is conducted in the whole mission to look for the two fugitives but to no avail. The church, the gardens, the sawmill, the garage, the brickworks, the farms, the sixa and even the school are all searched.

Father Drumont makes more inquiries and discovers that many men at the mission, including sixa Monitors, the chief brick maker, both the sacristans and even some of the bigger boys are implicated in having sexual intercourse with the sixa girls.

The two priests take the girls through a rigorous interrogation that is preceded by an initial flogging of fifteen strokes of the cane. The ones who do not subdue are added another ten strokes for good measure. Over fifteen girls are questioned and the priests learn that the sixa is operating like a brothel of some sort.

### **Bomba, Wednesday 18th February**

Consequent upon interrogating the girls, many male workers at the mission vanish for fear of reprisal. They instruct their wives to pack up their things and leave immediately for their villages.

Father Drumont contemplates disbanding the sixa but first brings a medical doctor to assess the health situation of the girls and the entire sixa in general.

Doctor Arnaud's assessment and examination shows a deplorable status quo. It reveals a pathetic and horrible sanitary situation. The sixa houses have leaking roofs; the walls have large openings which expose the occupants to extreme coldness at night. The bed is made of banana trunks and dried banana leaves and riddled with fleas, bed-bugs and other parasites. The compound at the sixa and inside the houses is extremely dirty. "Neither the courtyard nor the borders of the houses had been swept. Everything was covered in rubbish" bits of food, clothing and all kinds of filth all over the place."

The girls look emaciated and fatigued a sign of heavy labour beyond their capacity. They generally look weak. When the doctor announced that they would be examined one by one, fifteen of the girls run away, never to return. After examining thirty two of them, only eight are found clear; the rest are found to have contracted gonorrhea and syphilis in both primary and secondary stages. The doctor advises that they be treated either from his hospital or from the sixa. No conclusion is arrived at by the priests about treating the girls.

Father Drumont attributes the entire mess at the sixa to his negligence. He takes all the blame for failure to effectively monitor the goings on at the sixa.

### **Bomba, Thursday 19th February**

Father Drumont chases all the sixa girls away. He calls them together after Morning Mass and assembles them in front of the office and tells them in a raised voice, "Go back to your villages, I'm ashamed of you; you have dishonored my mission. I don't wish to see you again. Go".

The school boys, too, are sent off to their homes. Father Drumont rides off on his motor-bike to see the Bishop. With no sixa girls, no school boys, no mission workers around, there is total silence at Bomba Mission. There is no one in the whole mission but the Vicar, Anatole and Denis.

### **Bomba, Saturday 21st February**

Father Drumont brings in some labourers from the Bishop to help do some work at the mission since the mission workers had vanished.

Clementine comes to meet Father Drumont and tells him what is going on in her life. Her husband Zacharia is to marry Catherine and Clementine is to go back to her people. Father tries to persuade her to stick with her husband despite being a polygamist but she refuses. Father then gives her some bank notes to help her start a new life.

### **Sogola, Sunday 22nd February**

It is crunch time. Father Drumont is leaving Bomba for Europe, never to return. The people are saddened by the news of his departure and some are moved to tears. In his emotional farewell speech during mass, he blames the people for their unchristian conduct of turning the sixa into a den of satanic practices and asks them to wait for the Bishop's decision on the matter. He leaves them with a message of hope and beseeches them never to cease prayer because God is the answer to all concerns.

Denis is driven to his father's home and all the boys come running with cries of, "look, there is Jesus Christ!" Father Drumont gives Denis father some bank notes meant for the son. He implores the whole family to be good Christians, never to forget prayers. He promises never to forget Denis but to regularly write to him, send him photos of his parents, brothers, sisters and himself. He also promises to tell him all the local news of his country. Denis painfully bids the Father farewell and sees him disappear in the distance.

### **Sogolo**

It is three weeks since Father Drumont went to Europe. There is no communication yet to Denis. Feeling nostalgic about Bomba mission, Denis walks the twelve kilometer journey to the mission to have a feel of what it is without Father Drumont, Bomba looks like an abandoned village. On two occasions, the faithful had flocked the church expecting mass but there was none. The sacristy is now taken over by rats and lizards.

Denis feels like visiting Zacharia, just to see Catherine. He also begins to contemplate about Anatole's advice of going to town and gets a small boy's job with one of the Greek merchants.

### **Themes in *The Poor Christ of Bomba***

#### **Hypocrisy**

#### **Conscience**

Also noteworthy in the novel is the power of conscience. Man's conscience is his most efficient torturer. When we consider the psychological torture undergone by Dennis after his sexual encounter with Catherine, we are convinced to accept this assertion as nothing but the truth.

Although deep down in his heart the boy yearns for more, he cannot forgive himself for having committed the heinous crime – fornication, even while he dwells, dines and wines with the righteous. Because of this single act, Denis carries with him wherever he goes the conscience of a fornicator, of a sinner. He is so guilty-conscience that he finds it hard to serve the mass at service; he also finds it difficult to mingle with others in the church. He feels some sense of alienation. Thus, we are caged within ourselves when we blatantly disobey that humane order as laid down for us by our creator.

### **Christianity and colonialism**

Another major preoccupation of the novel is Christianity paving way for colonialism. The big question the author seems to pose is: why do the whitemen believe the blacks are sinners and so have to bend them to accept Christianity? It is not surprising that in the novel, the people, natives from other towns except Bomba, already know the answer to this question. Little wonder then that a man should be so angry with the Father (when the latter tries to tell him about Jesus Christ) that he rages: "Jesus Christ...another damned white! Another that I'd like to crush with my left foot...Do I come and tell you about my ancestors, huh?" The implication of this statement, therefore, is that Africans do not see the missionary activities of the white men in Africa as religiously driven; rather, they believe it is a sly path to colonialism.

To be sure, even though the Africans believe in some of the principles of Christianity, they find it a point of contention to abandon completely their own way, which is deeply rooted in their religion. It is then not surprising, therefore, when the natives of all the towns in the novel: from Bomba to Sogolo, antagonise the Father who appears to them more like a pretentious racist than a righteous clown he has presented himself. They believe it is outrageous for the so-called Father to have travelled all the way from his own land, crossing many oceans and forests, only to come and, blatantly, inform them of how wrong they have been in their ways and manners. Besides this, they equally hold that this is another potential means of labelling them, who are Africans, as sinners, and thus bringing home the hidden message that only the whites who are saints are capable of rescuing them from falling completely into the abyss of sin. This, we could deduct, is the position of Zacharia as he argues angrily, interrupting the catechist:

*Get away with you! That's not the truth of the matter at all. I'll tell you how it is, Father. The first of us who ran to religion, to your religion, came to it as a sort of....revelation. Yes, that's it, a revelation; a school where they could learn your secret, the secret of your power, of your aeroplanes and railways...in a word, the secret of your mystery. Instead of that, you began talking to them of God, of soul, of eternal life, and so forth. Do you really suppose they didn't know those things already, long before you came?*

While at Ziba, Zacharia talks about the people's perception about the whites and religion in this country of Taba. The people have a negative attitude towards the whites; they detest them. The Father still has to do a lot to win the people of Tala at all costs; they are still obstinate. They claim that there is no difference between a Greek trader and a priest, even one like Father Drumont. For evidence, they point to the wealth of the Catholic missions, all the presents which Father collects and all the cult dues. They say the Father is as greedy a tax-collector as The Administrator. Zacharia further tells Father that the people of Ziba have faith in Sanga Boto who says he has been charged by the ancestors to struggle against the whites. This explains why an attempt on the Father's life can be dared in broad day light as occasioned by Gono.

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In sum, *The Poor Christ of Bomba* is a satire on the catholic mission of the white men in Africa. The novel exposes the moral, spiritual, religious as well as the economic hypocrisy of the white men, foregrounding that it is only a cunning way into the path of extinction of the black race; for, indeed, of what significance are the people, stripped of their cultural values?

### **Oppression/torture/mistreatment/injustice**

Women in the novel are oppressed, tortured and unjustly treated by both colonialists, spearheaded by Father Drumont, and by the native African culture.

### **Disillusionment**

At Mombet, Father Drumont is very disappointed in the people. He questions the local catechist for long hours about the behavior of the people. The people have behaved very badly in the last three years that the father has not come around. He says he abandoned them for their own good. He finds that many of the converts have taken a second or even a third wife. Only little children still come for catechism on Wednesday meetings.

Back in Bomba from the pastoral tour, Father Drumont tells M.Vidal about his journey back to Europe, never to return to Bomba since he has failed in his mission. He tells M. Vidal his frustrations caused by imposing foreign customs upon people who hitherto cherished their customs, for example eating one another, dancing in the moonlight and wearing back charms around their necks.

### **Moral decadence**

On his tour of Tala Country, Father Drumont finds Mombet a morally rotten place. No one but only older women now pays the church dues. The more money people have, the less they think about God. For this immorality, Father Drumont wishes that God sends a sign to these people to bring them into the right path, a general misfortune or something terrible which will teach the people the hard way.

Zacharia gets a woman to sleep with that night in a room only a few meters from the father. The woman's cries are heard all the time and the bed creaks ceaselessly. Denis wonders what Zacharia is doing with the woman to make the bed creak. He wonders why she keeps suppressing cries, instead of lying peacefully.

Denis narrates to Father Drumont in details how Catherine had entered his room the previous night, teased him about being scared of her, re-assured him that he had nothing to worry about and started playing games with him on his bed. He explains how Catherine romanced him, sexually aroused him and inserted his sex organ into hers and started riding on him to and from until he reached orgasm.

The effect of the sexual encounter weighs heavily on Denis. He feels exhausted and sleeps off. He says, "And perhaps I had really died and been revived by a miracle". He is too ashamed to look Father Drumont straight in the face. He is too frightened to serve in the mass. Father now looks differently to him, "he was as white as sheet". When Father Wears a black Soutine in the sacristy, Denis is worried even the more. He feels Father is to reproach him during mass about his sex escapade the previous night. He even fails to take Holy Communion.

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### **Cultural clash**

Father Drumont comes across a group of people singing and dancing traditional song and dance outside the chief's house. The Father scatters the xylophones into pieces. He lifts the drums and throws them down. The chief comes and confronts the father, almost assaulting him physically but is restrained by his Father.

Father Drumont comes face to face with Sanga Boto. He challenges Sanga Boto to reveal his tricks, which he does. Sanga Boto explains many things admitting that he or one of his assistants would hide an evil fetish under someone's threshold or between two thatches of his roof, so that the sorcerer could later find it with a great display of triumph. Sanga Boto apologizes and even reveals his Christian name, Ferdinand. He even says the Lord's Prayer, a sign of his complete emptiness as a sorcerer.

### **Character and characterisation**

#### **Denis, the narrator**

Denis, the fourteen-year-old narrator and Drumont's houseboy. He naïvely and ironically identifies with the Christian and European values of the missionary. Accompanying Drumont on a pastoral tour of the bush, he records, but rarely comprehends, the conversations and activities of the entourage and the villagers. Loving and admiring the priest more than his own father, Denis criticizes his fellow Africans for their failure to adhere to Christian principles and their lack of

respect for Drumont. He is a sensitive and sweet adolescent who matures quickly as a result of the tour and his mentor's realizations about the brutality of the colonial mission.

The story follows the life of a young boy named Denis. Denis is an extremely confident young African boy who was taken in by Father Drumont to learn the right ways to live as a true disciple of Christ. As hinted in the title of the novel, Denis has to follow Father Drumont when making religious tour around the Bomba mission, which covers quite a few villages. His absolute confidence and self-assurance starts to crack and fall to shambles after having experienced some of the "true" nature of the believers and non-believers during the mission. Being exposed to the miscellaneous hypocritical deeds by his colleagues such as Raphael and Zacharia, Denis finds himself lost and confused as his initial pillar of faith is now in question.

Upon the failure of the mission, he regresses and gives in into the normative way of life of his fellow Cameroonians. In this section of the paper, we will be looking at Denis, who is the main character and also the narrator of the text. Denis' identity as a young Christianized African boy will be compromised at the end of the story. In other words, his initial self-assurance and confidence are stripped down by the many social ill throughout the novel. Denis, in words of Father Drumont himself in the novel, is a greenhorn, someone who never doubts his mission. This is because his father had urged him to follow and study under the apprenticeship of Father Drumont since young.

Naturally, Denis was raised in an environment where white supremacy is held high and of utmost importance in the society of Cameroon. Even as a native black, he has always regarded himself a special mix to the white circle for he was given the opportunity to serve within their direct vicinity. Therefore, his identity as a black has been compromised of that to his social surrounding which renders him blind to his own shortcomings and flaws.

In addition, fellow black Cameroonians who do not accept Christianity are coerced in force labour; yet Denis does not see the wrong in that. He asserts, "Ah, if only they'll build that road, if they'll beat and persecute these people, then perhaps they'll all return to God..." (38). However, it is interesting to note that even though Denis proclaims to be a "good Christian", he is still flawed to a fault. Serving alongside him is Zacharia, and he is the symbol of someone who accepts to toil under harsh labour. Denis detests him to the core for being such a hypocrite – an angel in front of Father Drumont but a devil behind him.

Denis is flawed with extreme jealousy even though he is not supposed to harbor such negative feeling for his comrade, especially when Zacharia does not do anything malicious to Denis: "Zacharia has no idea how I hate him. He couldn't possibly have taken my remark amiss" (50). The following excerpt also consolidates the extreme over-thinking on Denis's part concerning his negative feeling. He constantly justifies his own action, putting himself on an imaginary pedestal where he can feel superior amongst the rest, even though it may not be the case in reality. "After all, work is certainly more noble than Zacharia's and I'm sure people, the girls especially, admire me more than they do him. But I don't want to boast about it, like Zacharia..." (64)

Denis' turning point concerning his unwavering religious faith happens during the tour around Bomba mission. He has been a fan and idolizes Father Drumont for as long as he could remember because he is the one responsible in instilling the gospel in his life. Therefore, Denis has a certain expectation of "straightforwardness" from Father when it comes to delinquent native black people who refuse to accept the teachings of Christ. He questions. All the same, it's funny how he has behaved since we started this tour – almost as if he was afraid of people. He lets them talk about



rubbish about God and religion, and he actually listens to them (78). Here, his identity is conflicted because now, he feels more strongly about the gospel than Father himself. The fact that Father is willing to reason with the villagers aggravates him; it puts him in a restless state.

To further complicate, Denis has a sexual encounter with a girl named Catherine, who follows the tour group in Bomba secretly as well. She is supposed to be Zacharia's personal "consort" only but she takes advantage of Denis' overt innocence and with that, his virginity. "Oh God, what shall I do? I'm so unhappy. And all because of that cursed girl, Catherine. Ah! She is Satan herself (...) I should have watched out (...) But how could I have done? How could I suspect that she wanted to make me do that? (81). Denis is extremely conflicted at this point because he finds himself trapped in the situation where he sees no way out. Repressing the issue would make him a "bad" Christian; revealing the truth might cost him everything – even his position to serve Father Drumont. And so, he oscillates back and forth, about the decision he should make regarding the matter. Most of the time, he is justifying to himself that Father is a reasonable man – if he can listen to the corrupted people of Bomba, he surely can pardon his sins. All the same, he contradicts: "I wanted to terribly to do that thing again, not in the night this time, but by day, so that I could see her naked body (...) Oh, I would have given up anything to lift up Catherine's dress!" (91).

Things get worse for him as he discovers the devious plan between Zacharia and Raphael, the guardian of the sixa girls. Raphael, whom Denis has never suspected anything of, proves to be one of the culprits in demeaning the girls, making them sex slaves to whoever that can benefit him. He finds out that the only reason why Catherine was able to escape the sixa is because of certain "off-table" agreement between Zacharia and Raphael. This new piece of information sets him off, turning him into a paranoid. He thinks, "see what bad thoughts I have now! Having been duped so long, I'm beginning to suspect everyone and everything" (120).

Upon returning home from the Bomba mission, Denis does not feel too right about his current state of mind. He questions: What has happened to me? I am scarcely myself anymore. It's almost as if a stranger had penetrated me, slowly taking over and inhabiting my being, to such a point that I scarcely recognize myself (147). As indicated above, Denis has now lost all his prior known identity. From a highly confident and conceited young follower, Denis is now crumbled to a state of confusion, barely recognizing what is left of him. He started out with a strong sense of self, who he is, and what he stands for in the Cameroonian society. However, all is shackled after witnessing much retaliation from the mission – internally and externally. Non-believers claim that Father Drumont and Christianity are just like any other white people or "Greek merchants" because they only seek profits and riches of the land.

On the other hand, there is an unfathomable amount of corruption and hypocrisy within the religious circle as well; such as Zacharia and Raphael. In the end, Denis ponders if: "it would be useful to go regularly to school and improve my French. For instance, I would have understood better all the discussions between M.Vidal and the Reverend Father. (...) My God, it's all too complicated for me! (164). Ultimately, the Bomba mission fails and Father Drumont decides to go back to France. In the midst of somber and hopeless final scene, Denis musters whatever courage and faith he has left to move on. He notes, "I'm remembering the advice which Anatole gave me one evening! To go to the town and get a small boy's job with one of the Greek merchants... (219). In the end, Denis mentions the thought of taking up a job with one of the Greek merchants. This part marks a significant change in his thinking. The job is mentioned recursively throughout the novel in a negative light – a profession which reeks of dishonesty, artifice, and fraudulence. Therefore, for Denis to even consider taking up a job like that reflects the loss of faith in

Christianity. He concludes: "I'm beginning to wonder myself whether the Christian religion really suits us, whether it's really made to the measure of the black I used to believe firmly... (189).

Denis' pillar of faith in Christianity falls to shambles upon witnessing the many contradictory things during the Bomba mission.

### **Father Drumont**

Father Drumont, a bearded, middle-aged, archetypal Catholic missionary who founded and for twenty years nurtured the mission at Bomba. A stern but not humorless man, he is obsessed with sex and disillusioned by his failure to persuade Africans to follow church teachings on chastity and monogamy.

Frustrated by the persistence of the traditional African social and religious practices that he sees on his tour of the Tala villages, he concludes eventually that he cannot successfully Christianize the Africans. At the end of the tour, he decides to return to France. By then, he is a wiser man but is dejected because he realizes that his work has functioned to soften and prepare the Africans for an exploitative and brutal colonial system.

Father Drumont is intolerant to people who are not attentive during mass. He is unhappy with those who sit down when they are supposed to be standing up or standing when they should be kneeling. He drags a woman along by her left arm. He pulls her before the table and forces her down on her knees. He then climbs the pulpit casting heavy glances all around the church. He does not start the sermon until there is complete silence in the church, "Yes, I'm waiting. Some day perhaps you will stop coughing, and then I will be able to begin my sermon".

The author reveals Father Drumont as short-tempered and violent. A man comes complaining to him that he confiscated his wife who is in the sixa in Bomba yet he had paid seven thousand francs as her dowry. Father Drumont dismisses this claim of the man having married the woman, reasoning that "a civil marriage counts for nothing, if it is not completed by the sacrament". The man wants his wife back since she has already spent four months at the sixa and worked for free all the time. The Father slaps the man and sends him out of the chapel. He literally runs after him in annoyance.

### **Narrative techniques employed in *The Poor Christ of Bomba***

#### **Flashbacks**

The might of Abbe Jean Bitu is revealed through a flashback. Denis reveals that Ekokot is to be made into a big mission, like Bomba and a black priest; Abbe Jean Bitu is to be in charge. Abbe is said to have performed some miracles. One day he rebuked a man for his neglect of the virtue of chastity. The man answered him insolently and he punished the man by declaring that he would sleep in the forest that night and it happened. In another case, Abbe had found some girls bathing in the nude and punished them by commanding that they stay for two days in that river exactly as they were then, naked and upright. It happened as he had commanded.

A woman comes to complain to Father Drumont how her daughter was forced to marry a man who paid only five thousand francs and when the Father rebukes her she tells him in a flashback, how the whole business was transacted. The decision had been made in the men's house and the bride price had been determined without involving the girl in question or her mother. She was only called to be told to look at the man who would be her husband from then on. This reveals the injustice against women which prevails in the society.

### **Description**

Catherine is described to depict beauty. She has 'fine breasts': "When she laughed the skin of her cheeks fell into tiny dimples and her eyes blazed with a strange brilliance. Her skin was so fine that she looked like someone who spends her whole life bathing; not even a single scab, not a tattoo-scar. And her hands were so soft and small that obviously she seldom worked with them". This description depicts her as irresistibly beautiful; no wonder Zacharia is willing to abandon his wife Clementine for her.

### **Other narrative devices to be explored in the novel may include:**

Symbolism, irony, first person narration, dialogue and stream of consciousness.

### **Questions for discussion**

- 1 Discuss the author's portrayal of the whites in the novel, *The Poor Christ of Bomba*.
- 2 Account for Denis' transformation by the end of the novel, *The Poor Christ of Bomba*.
- 3 Discuss the contribution of Dr. Arnaud's report on the women's camp to your understanding of the novel, *The Poor Christ of Bomba*.
- 4 How far would you agree that Christianity paves way for colonialism in the novel, *The Poor Christ of Bomba*?
- 5 Discuss the author's portrayal of injustice in the novel, *The Poor Christ of Bomba*.
- 6 How effectively does Mongo Beti use first person narration in *The Poor Christ of Bomba*?
- 7 Discuss the social ills that Mongo Beti reveals in the novel, *The Poor Christ of Bomba*.

## **THE MOON ALSO SETS: OSI OGBU**

### **Introduction**

*The Moon Also Sets* is a fascinating story set in Isiakpu, a typical African Village in Nigeria and the University of Embakassi, a modern African university. It gives an interesting perspective of the conflict between traditional expectations and modernity. It is a story that revolves around two women- mother and daughter.

Mama Oby is a widow, who is a devoted Christian and has set her mind on raising her children and giving them a good education. She is a strong woman but also kind and generous- virtues which don't go well with her brother-in-law, Pa Okolo, who tries in vain to make her life hell. He is a cowardly bully who gets other people to do his dirty work.

Despite being illiterate, Mama Oby knows that the education of her children, more so her daughter, Oby, will bring about a big difference in her family. And as a widow in Isiakpu, she knows only too well the difficulties that women face in her community. Oby is an auxiliary teacher, but her dream is to join university. The story evolves as Oby is admitted in university, and mother and daughter struggle to push through the challenges brought about by male chauvinism present in both traditional and modern settings.

When Oby joins University, she hopes life would be different since people would be educated, but the challenges she encounters are sometimes unbearable. Before, she had her mother to offer advice, now she is the key decision maker. She sums up the university as:

*"The jungle is full of traps. You skip one; you are caught in the other. You can never be immunized against the attacks. You have to hop, skip and jump".*

Oby struggles to lead a full life in a modern but ever male-dominated world. She must face the conflicting demands of education and her career, and her relationship with Chike with whom she

pursues a modern and open sexual relationship, but in a society which is still in many ways conservative. She must then deal with the consequences for her future of becoming pregnant.

The novel tells an ordinary tale of love, campus life, family life and widowhood but places all this in a gender context that is at once familiar for its topicality among the global institutions and unfamiliar for the cultural environment in which it is addressed in this novel. The plot surrounds Mama Oby, a devout catholic and widow, working and negotiating relationships in a strongly patriarchal society. She is confronted with the arduous task of bringing up her children all by herself, while at the same time warding off the distractions posed by tradition as epitomized in Pa Okolo's constant needling. When her first daughter, Oby, got admitted into the University, Mama Oby is again forced to deal with the scars of modernity which University life had left on her daughter.

In a way, the subject of the novel could be viewed in the context of the triangular struggle between Tradition (represented by Pa Okolo), Christianity (represented by Mama Oby), and Modernity (represented by Oby). But this compartmentalization is not clear cut as each of these characters also has allegiance across the board. For instance, Oby is always quick to defend traditional values in her discussions with Chris, while Mama Oby considers it her duty to adhere to a village custom when the elders of Isiakpu rule that Obeta should be ostracized for committing murder, though it contradicts Christian principles to do so. A better way of viewing the subject of this novel, therefore, would be in the context of the paradoxical challenges facing a society in a state of flux.

### **Setting**

The book paints a vivid picture of the dilemma facing most post-colonial societies, which is that of defining a basis for its development. The traditional development trajectory has been thwarted by Christianity, which came alongside a contradictory modern culture that rejects both tradition and Christianity. People are constantly faced with a situation where actions are evaluated and re-evaluated through the lens of the three different competing value systems. For instance, in the novel, Mama Oby and most Catholics in Isiakpu profess Christianity, but at the same time chose to obey the traditional custom that ostracizes anyone accused of murder who refuses to swear before the village idol, against the direction of the church. Similarly, the Igwe, who carries himself as an exposed modern man, cares very little about both Christianity and traditional values especially when they stand on his way to success, even though he was supposed to be the custodian of the culture in his capacity as the ruler of Isiakpu.

### **Title**

In chapter twelve, a man called Mark finds Oby and Chike spending some quality time at the beach as they enjoy their new found love.

The title alludes to the element of justice. It is a kind of warning to all those who do wrong. But at the same time it is an encouragement to all those who are suffering that there is hope.

Mark addresses Chike and Oby and tells them that although they seem to be enjoying the full moon, things will change because the moon also sets. He expresses disillusionment with the way things are messed up. Despite his strange behavior and appearance, he talks a lot of sense about poor service delivery in his country which is full of quacks and bedeviled with grand corruption and characterized by moral degenerates, including Chike and Oby. He tells the lovebirds that it seems like a full moon for them but specifically warns the girl, "but young girl, remember the moon also sets". By implication, the blissful moments as the one now at the beach shall surely wane and bring forth dark moments.

On the other hand, the title seems to preach a message of optimism. Marks seems to suggest that time will come when things will change for the better, just like the moon sets to give way for the sunrise to start a bright day.

The numerous changes that occur in the novel also help to give meaning to the title. The narrator highlights things are no longer the same in Isiakpu. The moon had set on the daughters of Ndu Nwa Agu. Their drums and flutes had been silenced by greed, modernity and corruption. The dancing steps of their daughters had also become timid and less assertive; the moon has therefore set. The dramatic turn of events both in Isiakpu and Embarkassi is a reflection that the moon also sets: Father Damian is replaced with another religious leader, Pa Okolo commits suicide, Uncle Ben is arrested and sentenced, the Igwe has disappeared from his palace and escapes to Lagos purportedly on a six-month business trip, Oby gets pregnant and nearly dies in an abortion induced by Chike and Okoro, Professor Akpanu's sexual exploits are exposed, Chike loses his place in Oby's heart and is replaced by Chris. Towards the end of the novel, Oby remembers the mad man at the beach who reminded her that the moon also sets.

### **Chapter summeries**

#### **Part I**

#### **A Widow's might**

#### **Chapter One**

Obiageli Onyia (Oby) is running out of patience. The two attempts to join the university have not been successful yet she has the requisite qualifications. At 19 years now, the anxiety for university education is developing into disillusionment. In the meantime, she helps her mother to work on the farm, and work as an auxiliary teacher.

Mama Oby has endured the pressure from her in-laws after the death of her husband to cultivate on an acre of red soil in order to raise her daughter, Oby, single-handedly. She comports the daughter to believe in God's providence with or without university education; life must go on.

Mama Oby contemplates enlisting the support of her brother, Amechi who lives in Onitsha, because he understands the social dynamics of the Nigerian society, to help her out with the matter of Oby's admission.

The narrator then takes us to the time Mama Oby, who is now 40 years, was baptized Abigail Onyia but was initially called Oyodo nwa Eze. We are then taken through the Isiakpu tradition that is portrayed as patriarchal and violated the rights of women in preference for male chauvinism; a woman was only referred to as mother of her first child; men had no sympathy for barren women, a female adult who was still single was looked down upon; a woman had no say in the society- not even on matters that affected her. The only way out is to empower Oby with education, so thought Mama Oby.

Papa Okolo, fondly referred to as Pa Okolo calls a meeting, as the head of Mama Oby's in-laws. During the meeting, the convener instructs Mama Oby to select one of the brothers of her late husband. When she refuses, she is given Uncle Ben forcefully to inherit her. She walks away in protest.

A gloomy picture is painted of the Isiakpu society; a woman whose husband dies is treated like a common criminal; all the family property is taken away from her the in-laws, and she has to go through a lengthy period of punishment for letting the man die. Generally, the life of a woman in

this society is doomed – her rights are grossly violated. Education is the only tool that can help liberate the female gender from this unfairness.

## **Chapter Two**

The dark clouds on this particular Saturday evening have a sinister message in it. After the usual Christian Mothers Association meeting, Father Damian sends his cook to call Mama Oby. The cleric emerges from his bedroom in the most ridiculous manner expected of a responsible religious leader, “he wore a pair of shorts and a singlet that partly showed his chest and its scanty hair.”

He lures her into his bedroom, claiming he has something special to show her, only to herald her into an atmosphere of love-making because the music in the background, “What a wonderful world” by Louise Armstrong is meant to arouse her love feelings. He grabs her in an attempt to sexually assault her but she courageously pushes him away, and flees the scene. She gets out of the house to go home but the impending storm is threatening as thunder bolts crack the sky, followed by quick successions of thunder.

## **Chapter Three**

It is Sunday and preparations for church are on. At the church, Father Damian preaches about the village politics and morality in a characteristic lengthy and boring sermon. An incident is recalled of the previous year when a young man from the city had visited his parents in the village and walked out of church during the sermon. As expected, Father Damian commented against his action but later when the same young man made a generous donation at the annual bazaar of the Catholic Church, he became the pride of Isiakpu.

Mama Oby then recounts the circumstances under which her son Ikechukwu was born to give a background of the strong bond between her and the child; she gave birth to him after the death of her husband, raising a lot of suspicion from the villagers of Isiakpu since it happened within the same year the widow was supposed to be mourning her late husband; they think she did the abominable-having sex with another man during the forbidden period of mourning.

Meanwhile, during the church service, Oby and her mother pray for God’s intervention in her failed attempt to access university admission. After the mass, people usually proceeded to the palm-wine market for small talk and business engagements.

Later on, Mama Ijeoma meets Mama Oby and asks her about the progress of the daughter’s university admission. When Mama Oby responds in the negative her colleague suggests that they arrange to see a lecturer from the University of Nigeria to help out.

She ponders about the advice, reads from the book of Isaiah for comfort, and remembers Psalm 23- Before long, Uncle Ben comes. He has come to perform his conjugal obligations since he was given the woman during the family meeting. However, he meets stiff resistance from Mama Oby.

## **Chapter Four**

Amechi has finished his school certificate examinations and is waiting for the results. His wish is to do an apprenticeship in motor-parts in order to become a successful businessman like his late father, and uncle Amechi who has paid his school dues. He does not desire to proceed with university education because he wants to relieve his mother of the burden of having to look for money to sustain him at school.

Isiakpu is a society that has thrived in business, owing to its well organized system that involves the boys in apprenticeship programmes early enough, only to emerge as successful businessmen at a tender age.

Shortly after settling down for the midday lunch, the officer in-charge of the village postal agency comes with good news for Oby; she has been offered a place at the University of Embakassi to study sociology. This news is celebrated with a lot of fanfare by family members and friends. Mama Oby wants a send-off party for her daughter but Oby does not want it as it will cause an unnecessary financial pressure. Mama Oby wishes her husband were still alive; it would be a grand send-off for their daughter.

The events leading to the death of Alfred Onyia, fondly referred to as Papa Oby, are recounted in a flashback. He was a fairly successful businessman with rentals in Kano and Nsukka. He was killed in the second massacre of the Igbos on the eve of the civil war. His body was never found.

### **Chapter Five**

Amechi is sent to uncle Amechi's home in Onitsha to deliver the good news about Oby's admission to the university and also invite him for the send-off party slated to take place on Friday.

Uncle Amechi advises his nephew to follow his sister's footsteps and proceed with his university education since all his dues shall be paid, instead of thinking about joining apprenticeship to become a motor mechanic.

After a meal, uncle Amechi counts one thousand naira to give to Amechi to take to his mother but the wife quickly grabs the money from the husband and only gives back half of it to be taken to Mama Oby on account that it is simply too much money.

### **Chapter Six**

The send-off party at Mama Oby's home in Isiakpu; many people are in attendance others have already offered Oby advice in private. They eat and take palm-wine then Pa Okolo stands up to speak. He observes that the late Alfred Onyia had principles that bound his family. He punctuates his speech with proverbs aimed at warning Oby to beware of the wickedness that awaits her at the university. Mama Oby, too, speaks and blesses the daughter, imploring her to remain steadfast in face of temptation while at the university.

Mama Ijeoma asks her counterpart, mama Oby, if she has packed some contraceptives for her daughter. The latter finds this extremely queer since she has brought. She thinks it is immoral to think about contraceptive.

## **Part II**

### **Searching for the Golden Fleece**

#### **Chapter Seven**

Oby has arrived at the University of Embakassi; it is a whole new world for her. It is a rather strange place with strange people. She has nowhere to start from. She asks a Youngman passing by to help direct her to the girls' hostel. The twenty-two year old man whom we later realize is called Chike helps her with some of her luggage to porter's lodge where she first settles.

The following day, Chike and two of his other friends, Chris Onuora and Okoro Ohulo engage in gossip about campus girls, including Oby.

The narrator gives background information about the three young men above: Christ, 20 years old is a student of geography whose ambition is to become a pilot and comes from an enlightened family; the father is a professor of business management while the mother is a secondary school principal.

This background gives him a polished look. He does not hold rigidly to his views. Okoro, a 20 year old student of business management whose father is an illiterate but a wealthy businessman.

He comes from a polygamous family background, Chike, 23 years old lived alone without parental influence.

### **Chapter Eight**

Two weeks after Oby had reported for studies. She now lives permanently at Mary Slessor Hall, room 146. She is now acquainted with the daily routine at campus. She becomes friendly to Chike; they get to know each other by revealing the necessary background information. They engage in an intimate conversation about campus life, which Oby finds odd; people behave strangely. Her naivety and innocence is revealed in this chapter.

### **Chapter Nine**

Oby, her two roommates, ADA AND Fumi are in room 146. Oby dozes off after a hectic day, only to wake up to a bizarre sight; Ada and her boyfriend Ben passionately kissing while Fumi and Uche touched and caressed each other intimately.

Uche's relationship with Fumi is considered abnormal, owing to their tribal differences; she is Yoruba while Uche is Igbo. They have however, withstood all obstacles to sustain the relationship.

Ben's relationship with Ada on the other hand is not as strong. It is a loveless relationship with strings attached; Ada treats men as cash machines.

The reality dawns on Oby that life at campus is more likely to be based on survival instincts rather than following the rules and regulations and advice given from home.

### **Chapter Ten**

Chike and his friends, Chris and Okoro at Chike's room in Dr. Akanu Ibiam Hall. They discuss the usual campus gossip and would like to know if Chike has made any progress in pursuing Oby's love. They want her to be part of the team so that they are three couples. They then share their sex escapades; Chris' story is a humorous one; he asks the girl during the act of sex whether she is Cumming. She jumps off the bed and runs to hide in the bathroom, thinking that Chris was expecting someone else. Meanwhile, it appears the love chemistry between Oby and Chike might have started to work; Chike strongly feels things shall work out fine. He has started to compose poems for her.

### **Chapter Eleven**

Chike visits Oby at her residence to deliver the love poem composed the previous day but finds when she is not around. Her room mates, Ada and Fumi tease him that the only smooth road to Oby's heart is to treat them nicely; take them out for dinner at the hotel Metropol, and finish the evening with a bottle of gin and lime. Chike accepts to fulfill their demands but when he addresses them as "senior girls", they are enraged.

After Chike has left, the girls wonder if they could tell Oby what they read about him in "The Bee, or let her go through what they call "baptism of fire" from Chike. Apparently, there has been gossip



ordinarily huge sexual organ that caused a girl he once was supposed to have sex with to abandon the act and run for her dear life. Ada insists the story is true but Fumi says that is a different version. The version that Uncle told her is that the girl refused to have sex with Chike because he refused to wear a condom.

Oby comes back after the two girls have gone for dinner and finds an envelope addressed to her, signed by Chike. It a poem:

*“Love is like a child;  
Naked in its innocence  
Intoxicating when it is care free,  
Uninhibited in its flow  
It must be embraced as  
Child embraces mother  
Cuddly, suckly and twosome;  
One who gives, receives  
Knows neither boundary nor audience  
From the flat riverside of Onitsha  
To the hilly valleys of Nsukka, it flows  
The language is the same;  
Like a child, it might not make sense;  
Like a child needing attention;  
Touch, thirst, desire are time bound;  
Time is of the essence;  
Now is the time”*

This poem leaves an indelible mark in Oby’s heart. The following day, she looks for Chike outside her lecture room and even allows him to touch her in the presence of other people; she is all smiles and suggests that they go to the beach the following Saturday; love is simply in the air.

## **Chapter Twelve**

Time flies. It is Saturday – time to go to the beach. The lovebirds are set; they have dressed appropriately for the occasion.

While at the beach; they enjoy romantic moments; they tell each other words that soothe the soul and woo themselves. Oby entreats Chike to always love her and never cheat on her with any other woman; Chike promises to be faithful to her. They then kiss gently, slowly and passionately.

This drives Oby wild as she is “moved and kicked with pleasure”. Their pleasure is momentarily disturbed by the barking of a tiny, malnourished dog.

Shortly thereafter, an almost naked man who seems eccentric comes muttering to himself and laughing. His behaviour is bizarre, “he would hold his penis, leap into the air and laugh more loudly! What is surprising, however, is the insight the man, who later reveals himself as Mark, has about his country. He projects a picture of a man disillusioned by the happenings in his country.

He believes people should always tell the truth, “the truth is always bitter but only the truth shall set you free”. The message seems to be directed to the young couple but then Mark comments about the various professionals, civil servants and other bearcats paid for no work done, or for

shoddy work done. He presents a morally degenerated and corrupt country and wonders what the young generation will do to remedy the messy status quo.

To him the filth at the beach is symbolic of the filth of the entire nation. He tells the two lovebirds that they are adding to the pollution of the beach not necessarily in the physical sense but morally.

He sounds a warning when he says, "It seems like a full moon for both Oby and Chike but specifically warns the girl, "But young girl, remember the moon also sets." By implication, nothing lasts forever; the blissful moments as the one now at the beach shall surely wane and bring forth dark moments, just like the moon also sets.

### **Chapter Thirteen**

The Igwe of Isiakpu, chief Ugwueze pays a visit to Pa Okolo at 5:30am. They begin by partaking of the vodka the chief has come with before he goes to the heart of the matter as far as his visit is concerned.

The chief is displeased with his son Ndubisi who has been in America for about eight years and is now likely to marry an **Oyibo** woman (An American); Pa Okolo should do something and avert this impending shame by giving out Oby to be married by Ndubisi, in order for him (Pa Okolo) to get a place among the council of elders.

Pa Okolo promises to respond positively because as head of the family, he has full powers to decide.

### **Chapter Fourteen**

Very early the next day at around 5:00am, Pa Okolo knocks at Mama Oby's door to deliver the Igwe's news. He tries to make it sound like there is a lot to benefit from accepting to marry the chief's son; prestige, wealth and connections are some of things awaiting Oby, should her mother accept to marry her to Ndubisi since he is heir to the throne. He tells Mama Oby that Oby stands to lose if she turns down this marriage proposal because she is not circumcised, therefore, no man from Isiakpu would accept to marry her.

In what seems like a rebuttal, Mama Oby stands her ground and refuses to be intimidated. She vehemently rejects Pa Okolo's idea, especially because the concerned party, Oby, has not been contacted to seek her consent.

Pa Okolo thinks it is not necessary to seek Oby's consent. Mama Oby wonders whether it was wise for her to remain in a village that has no regards to the rights of woman.

## **PART III**

### **Is this Love?**

#### **Chapter Fifteen**

It is almost end of the first semester. Oby has gone through and seen a lot at campus; her relationship with Chike is stable, she has seen and heard about a cult but what surprises her most is the fact that the majority membership of this cult are the rich and famous. The numerous student demonstrations that have always been quelled violently depict the lawlessness in a place she thought should be an ivory tower.

The numerous cases of rape, sexual advances by lecturers to female students and the strong corrupting influence in the environment leaves her stupefied.

As Oby walks to have dinner, she meets Christ, who offers her company; they move together sit at the same table and engage in tete-a-tetes about Oby, Chike, Chris and Okoro. They discuss several topics, ranging from campus relationships to women's rights, to sugar-daddies and "bush-meat" among others until they leave the cafeteria.

## **Chapter Sixteen**

Chike and Okoro have returned from Aba and have organized to celebrate Okoro's birthday at the Metropol Hotels as they wait for the economics Handover party where Chike is going to be the new president. Chike asks Oby to come along with her roommates, in fulfillment of the promise made earlier to the two girls. This, however, leaves him financially wounded (he deposits his gold watch to the hotel manager for inability to clear all the bills).

Oby and her roommates leave for their hostel, leaving Chike, his friends with their girlfriends, Cynthia and Ifeoma. Oby, however, comes back to join the rest for a continuation.

What surprises everyone is when Oby asks for Fanta when everyone else is taking a beer. Small talks keep them going until Chike excuses himself for a short call; he is followed by Chris and Okoro. The unexpected happens; Cynthia asks Oby the truth about Chike's "big stuff". To their amazement, Oby has no idea of what they are talking about. Cynthia bluntly asks her if Chike has a huge sexual organ as reported in "The Bee". Oby downplays this. Before long, Chike and Oby leave while the other two couples remain at the Matropol for the night.

Back to campus, on the concrete seat, Oby asks Chike to clarify what the girls at the hotel talked about and Chike tells her his version of what transpired between him and his ex-girlfriend and dares her to touch and feel if they are as big as reported to be. This takes the two to a steamy session of romancing each other. It is the loud chirping of a cricket buried in the grass nearly that alerts the two lovers back to their senses.

## **Chapter Seventeen**

It is the economics gala night and Chike is to be sworn in as the president of the economics students Association. He comes to pick his girlfriend up but finds her still preparing since he has arrived earlier than expected.

While he waits for her to dress up, he goes through a photo album given to him by Oby. In the process, a photograph with father Damian drops on his laps, which evokes memories of the past events involving himself, Father Damian and two catholic nuns. These events transpired way back when Chike was a teacher at Asaba and had an apartment.

One day, Father Damian came unannounced with two catholic sisters in two. They found Chike listening to Osita Osadebe's "Makojo" and quickly started dancing and eventually engaged in the sacrilegious act of sex. Oby is reluctant to believe Chike's story but is now ready and they set off for the party.

## **Chapter Eighteen**

The long awaited moment has come. All the invited guests for the functions, including the guest of honour, (President of the Banking society of Embakassi), have arrived. Speeches are made; first by the guest of honour, who deplored the absence of woman in the banking sector and other economics driven careers, Chike then delivers his acceptance speech. His speech reflects the state of the economy in which the leaders are not prepared to invest in the future. He advises that "we

must in our deeds and intent avoid opportunistic actions". He further adds, "There is no substitute to investment in infrastructure, education and health. There is no substitute to good governance and macro-economic stability".

Chike's speech earns him a standing ovation from the audience. However, he is uncomfortable with Meg's presence at this function. Meg is his former girlfriend who can mean to be erratic and behave hysterically, especially after a couple of drinks. He asks Okoro to work with Jim to get rid of Meg. Sooner than later, the mission is accomplished; Meg is completely out of the way.

During the dance, Oby asks for a punch drink because she is fed up of soda. This gives Chike an opportunity to intoxicate her with a mixture of whisky and the punch. She however takes more than enough and gets totally drunk and starts acting crazily.

Chike and Chris lead her out to Chike's room where she becomes unconscious (passes out). The young men become panicky because Oby is literary in comma.

After a long time of struggling to save Oby with no success, she regains her consciousness and orders Chike to undress and do to her what he had wanted all along. It becomes clear that Oby had also planned to lose her virginity at the economics gala even if Chike had not intoxicated her. She asks him to have sex with her but requests him to be gentle since it is going to be her first time. With her endurance, and readiness, and his experience, it passes without much difficulty. After the sexual encounter, Chike slips out of bed, with mixed emotions, sits down to write a love poem for Oby:

### **Lost in the Crowd**

Lovely thoughts and evil plans

Driven by my emotions but controlled by the crowd. As I succumbed to the echo,

I failed to realize that the path that leads to treasures is often not well traveled.

It is not passion; it is greed, but it is also love.

Love with evil passion is like education without morality.

Both are evil; both are destructive.

Shadows reflect reality; with light or darkness, your body radiates with gentle calmness; Alluring, compelling and inviting. Your "lifeless" naked body was my anguish; the emptiness of my plans.

Faced with the loot as with an unseasoned animal, I trembled and fell.

The end did not have a beginning, and both the means and the end were a carcass.

As dignified with clothes on as without;

Sorry that this reality had a sour taste to it;

As nature endowed you; so did it deny me appropriate feeling;

My sense was gone, I could only cry.

Sorry my impatience, my impertinence, caused you harm.

The dead are alive; with pain came pleasure and relief.

But it didn't have to be that way. Your sanctuary,

Our sanctuary.

Broken into gently, was like removing the casing from old wine;

The content was a treasure; revealing the depth of your warmth and inviolability; what a revelation.

It is now our melting pot; our bond. A sacred treasure preserved and untapped; your wish has become my command. How lucky I am; how ungrateful I was.

Forgive and forget.

For the broken seal is the seal of our friendship;

The many joys and pains are the glue to our love;

The grease to our roller-coaster.  
Never again shall we look back and never again shall we toast to others.  
Time, place and speed shall be ours.  
We shall be the masters of our destiny.  
I am sorry. I sincerely love you.

#### **Part IV**

#### **Tradition and Ambition**

#### **Chapter nineteen**

The chief wants a reply as regards the marriage proposal but Pa Okolo has been playing hard to get. On several occasions, he has dodged the chief but he cannot dodge any longer. He eventually goes to the chief's palace, sweating in the 5 am chill.

In a lengthy flashback (about ten pages from page 154 to 164), the story of how the mystical powers of the Ndu Nwa Agu clan in Isiakpu that were in the forest that had been cleared to build the chief's palace were destroyed. The wrath of the gods was heavily felt on the people who engaged in the destruction of the forest in one way or another.

The two surveyors who surveyed the land died and many other people in Isiakpu died. The situation became intolerable until the chief brought two strong medicine men who performed cleansing rituals to save the society from total destruction.

Since that time, things had dramatically changed in Isiakpu. Things were no longer the same. The moon had set on the daughters of Ndu Nwa Agu. Their drums and flutes had been silenced by greed, modernity and corruption. There were no environmental groups to protect the forest and its sanctity. And even if there were, they would not have withstood the chief's forces.

When the Ndu Nwa Agu now beat their Okanga and blow their oja, they only do so with a sense of nostalgia.

The dancing steps of their daughters, igbu owo, had also become timid and less assertive. The moon had therefore set.

Twelve days after the medianemen had performed the cleansing rituals, the forest was leveled in a week's time and the chief's house was built in one year.

Pa Okolo then delivers a message of rejection from Mama Oby. After discussing the issue for some time, the chief suggests that instead of engaging in unhealthy battles with Mama Oby, they should contact Mama Ijeoma to offer her daughter.

#### **Chapter twenty**

The first academic year at the University of Isiakpu is finished and Oby is back home for the long vacation. Oby narrates to her mother the self discoveries that she made during the first year at the university; some were striking but some were worrisome for the mother. The mother wants to know her specific experiences with boys at the university, to which Oby tells her about chike who is generally good but always swayed by the crowd, something the mother finds to be dangerous.

Mother and daughter talk about many things, including pre-marital sex, abortions and family planning. The girl wants to face the reality while the mother wants the ideal situation Oby expects her mother to understand but she (the mother) talks from the experience of her generation. Mama

Oby apologizes to her daughter for showing insufficient understanding but tells her to remember that the world is unfair to woman and in whatever a woman does, she should realize that those who set the rules have different expectations for women.

Mama Oby remarks that she is worried because values in Isiakpu are changing faster than one can imagine; nothing is sacred anymore. There is a major crisis in the church; the church is in direct conflict with the traditional practices and customs of the people of Isiakpu; Obete, a man accused of poisoning his brother's son, Ezekiel Nwaeze, disappears without swearing before the Alusi to prove his innocence and Father Damian declares him a full member of the Association and instructs all Christians from Isiakpu to make sure no harm come to him. Mama Oby remarks that Obete's actions would tantamount to him being ostracized by the whole village but now Father Damian wants to split the entire community because he is behaving as if he does not understand the customs of the people of Isiakpu.

When asked to reconsider his decision, Father Damian excommunicated all the Christian faithfuls, except for Obete, now baptized and called Michael Mwaeze, and Mama Ijeoma. The Father had gone ahead to instruct all the Catholics to pass through Obete's house on their way to church every Sunday as their only way of confirming that they had, indeed contravened the ostracism decree. No catholic Obeyed, except Mama Ijeoma.

Oby wonders where the chief has been when all the above happened and her mother tells her that the chief is busy plotting with Pa Okolo to marry her (Oby) off to the chief's son, Ndubisi. Oby asks if the chief is not an **Osu** who should not have been chief in the first place because a chief is supposed to be from a certain lineage; Mama Oby retorts that values in Isiakpu are changing faster than one can cope with the changes. Oby says she is not for maintaining some of the outdated traditions.

Oby asks the mother to tell her the woman-to-woman talk she suggested earlier on and the topic of female genital mutilation comes up.

Oby is given the background to the topic then the mother tells her daughter the story of a girl who almost died of over bleeding after a forceful circumcision. They both agree that it is a harrowing story but end at no conclusion on the topic.

## **Chapter Twenty- one**

It is time to celebrate the new yam festival. It is a thanks giving festival for the gift of life. This festival is normally characterized by many cultural activities, among which a masquerade called the **Akatakpa** whose aim is to administer instant justice on the undisciplined and those deemed disrespectful.

The **Akatakpa** is supposed to symbolize the spirits of the forefathers of Isiakpu because it delivered their, message. It was therefore supposed to be respected by all.

However, as the society and its values evolve, the symbolic importance of the **Akatakpa** has also begun to wane. It has become an instrument for revenge, for settling rejected amorous advances, and for teaching some people a lesson.

In a flashback, it is recorded that when Mama Oby came back to settle in the village after the civil war, she teamed up with Mama Ijeoma and a few other women to fight against the **Akatakpa** masquerades. Owing to numerous complaints from neighboring towns and churches, the practice

forced the previous chief and his council of elders to partially suspend their activities. The new chief after persuasion from the traditionalist fought to have the ban lifted.

The above aside, Mama Oby has organized a small luncheon to be thankful to God for: Oby's university education, Amechis' secondary education and her business. Unexpectedly, Mama Ijeoma comes with father Damian to report that the chief is interested in Ijeoma. The unwelcome visitors soon leave, owing to the cold reception. Before long, information comes in that fire has razed Mama Oby's shop at the eke market and nothing has been saved and no one knows who has done it. It soon becomes known that it was the work of the Akatakpa, and Pa Okolo has knowledge about it. Uncle Ben is actually one of the people responsible. The whole plan of how the assignment was executed is revealed by Uncle Ben on page 204.

The following day, Oby goes to report the matter to the central police station at Nsukka. She records a statement and is given a police sergeant to go and investigate the matter. Uncle Ben is picked up and the chief summons the investigators to his palace and bribes them. He later that day goes to Mama Oby's home to offer a large envelope full of money but is totally humiliated when his money is thrown back into the car. He promises to teach Mama Oby a bitter lesson.

Oby goes back to the same police station to express her dissatisfaction in the manner in which the whole matter had been handled. Uncle Ben is re-arrested. The chief tries to secure his release on bail in vain.

Uncle Ben is arraigned at the magistrate's court and sentenced to twelve months in prison, with hard labour. The chief disappeared from the village for close to six months. Pa Okolo commits suicide after taking twenty-two tablets of chloroquine with vodka got from the chief's palace.

## **Part V**

### **The Moon Finally Sets**

#### **Chapter Twenty- two**

Professor Akpanu has just returned from one year's sabbatical leave at Cairo University in Egypt. Despite his academic accomplishments, he has questionable morality and been bypassed for promotion as Associate Professor. He is hooked to wine and women especially young students whom he sneaked into the house at night when his wife is on night duty at a nearby hospital where she worked as a nurse. Out of frustration at his shameless womanizing and physical abuse, she leaves him and returns to Russia with their three children.

He spends much of his time at Cash Madam's beer parlour until late. One day he comes back from his drinking spree only to find a note from Elena, his wife, who had left with the children to Russia.

Oby is back to the university for the second academic year. She narrates to Chike what transpired at home during the vacation.

Before long, Oby and professor Akpanu get in touch to discuss Boy's term paper that is to be presented at the end of the semester. She is, however, uncomfortable identifying with him, owing to his womanizing record at the campus; people will think she is the next target. He always preached that a woman had to use what she has to get what she needs.

The next issue of “The Bee” which is to come out soon will focus on Oby and chike; Okoro and Chris have already got wind of it. The three friends plan to steal the master copy from the office to save Oby the embarrassment of being exposed to the whole public.

### **Chapter twenty- three**

It is 7:30am and Oby has turned up for the appointment with professor Akpanu at his office. Unfortunately, he ‘forget’ her term paper and he has to drive with her in his vehicle to his home.

At his home, he gives her the paper but to her disappointment, it is full of red marks, indicating it is substandard. When she asks what to do to improve, the professor starts to unbutton his shirt. He attempts to have sex with her but she puts up a spirited fight to free herself. She realizes this could be recipe for disaster and becomes apologetic and promises to cooperate later on when she is fine because she is now going through her monthly menstrual periods. The professor drives her back to the university.

Meanwhile, “The Bee” has stung. The magazine has been published and the lead story is Oby and Chike. This leaves Oby greatly devastated.

Later after composing herself and having a steamy session of love making, Oby tells Chike the scenario between her and the professor earlier on in the day. Chike advises her to use her senses to get out of the situation. She reads from Psalm 120 for inspiration and guidance.

### **Chapter Twenty – four**

It has been a while since Oby and chike met, owing to the busy schedule that finalists have or it could be a deliberate move to allow Oby time to heal from the damage caused by “The Bee”.

Chris meets Oby and they discuss the events that have transpired and Oby wonders why Chris has not been there for her. She tells him there is a worse off scenario than that of “The Bee”; Professor Akpanu wants to have sex with her for marks. Chris advises her to be bold and dare do something courageous- kick his balls. He intimates to her that if she fearlessly attacks the professor, it shall mark the end of his habit of molesting female students for marks. He gives her a scenario that led to civil disobedience in America when a black seat in a bus to allow white women takes her front row seat. Oby is scared but Chris encourages her to give it a shot because “True peace is not merely the absence of tension; it is the presence of justice” Justice for all.

The following day Oby receives a letter from her mother; she inquires how Oby is fairing at campus and informs her all is well at home because business is booming like never before as if the arsonist just paved way for better things. The once hostile unless are now much friendlier. Father Damian has left Isiakpu; he has gone to Rome for further studies; there is a new priest in Isiakpu, Father Michael Anayo. The Catholic Church is back again. Still in the letter, the mother advises the daughter not to sell her dignity for the sake of a university degree because she will graduate by the grace of God. She advises her to stick to the lord and not do anything silly.

The agreed time has come. Oby goes to meet the professor. She moves to his office where he has been waiting for her. Before long, he begins to slowly take off her clothes, then pulls, down her pants to her legs. He soon unzips and drops his pants and it is time for action. As the professor prepares to insert his sex machine, Oby kicks him very hard between his legs, leaves him writing in pain. Chris comes just on time with a camera to take pictures of the professor lying naked on the floor.



Chris later proposes love to Oby; he would like them to be lovers but she does not grant it. A week later, two copies of the professor's photographs are sent to him as a warning. In the end Oby passes the course with a B, which she thinks is her rightful grade.

### **Chapter twenty-five**

Oby has missed her menstrual period. She suspects that she could be pregnant. After carrying out a pregnancy test, it is confirmed she is pregnant.

Oby breaks the news to Chike who suggests she should abort but Oby has made up her mind to have the baby. Chike shares this with his friends and expresses his unwillingness to marry Oby and have the baby.

Okoro offers to help; plan A and plan B. They settle for plan B, which involves giving Oby an abortion-inducing drug called touch-and-go. Before long, Oby starts to bleed, goes to meet Dr. Inyang who realizes that an abortion had been induced; she operates on Oby and gets Chike arrested. Oby only gets back to her senses upon hearing the name Chris. They pronounce and profess love for each other. Later in the night, while holding each other, Oby remembers the mad man at the beach who reminded Chike and her that the moon also sets. She also remembers Psalm 121:

*"The sun cannot hurt you during the day, and the moon cannot hurt you at night. The lord will protect you from all dangers. He will guide your life."*

### **Themes in *The Moon Also Sets***

#### **Injustices against women**

*The Moon Also Sets* mirrors the lives of two female characters- Mama Oby and Oby- as they both struggle through patriarchal societies that discriminate against women. To their chagrin, the mother and her daughter find out they share the same experience- whether with unlettered men in rural Isiakpu or with educated men that occupy the ivory tower of the University of Embakassi. Their interactions with the men in their lives reveal to them that women are needed for their sexuality and fecundity. Osi Ogbu shows that the rights of women are violated simply because of their sex.

The novel portrays that the life of a woman- whether married or unmarried, young or old, widowed or not as being synonymous with the **osu** caste system which operates in the world of the characters. It further shows that a woman, whether educated or not, whether she lives in the unscientific and superstitious Isiakpu or in the citadel of education, University of Embakassi, goes through untold hardship, as a result of the discrimination she is subjected to because of her sex.

Among the people of Isiakpu, a woman is called as mother of her first child, a childless marriage for a woman is a meaningless life. The society has no sympathy for a barren woman; the men of Isiakpu are intolerant to barren women. However, children born out of wedlock have no place in society. An adult female who does not get married is regarded inconsequential.

In Isiakpu, a woman has no mind of her own. All decisions, including those affecting women are made by men. The chief, for instance, takes a decision to have his son marry Oby without seeking Oby's consent.

Recognition in the homestead in Isiakpu for a woman is by giving birth to male off springs, heir to the family property upon the death of the father.

Upon the death of a man, his wife had to be inherited by one of his brothers. A man believed to have no control over his wife is never respected among his peers.

A woman whose husband dies young is accused of killing him and has to go through a lengthy period of harsh treatment for letting him die; a woman who gives birth during the mandatory one year of morning faces the full wrath of the people of Isiakpu while no harm would come to the man responsible for such a pregnancy. Fellow women are used to punish the offenders.

Pa Okolo draws a weekly schedule for his wives to share his bed but does not strictly adhere to it; without explanation, he disregards the schedule in favour of his youngest wife. The second wife lost her favourite status when a newcomer arrived; she felt extremely frustrated and started long-distance trading.

During cultural functions meant to cleanse one who had desecrated the Ndu Nwa Agu clan by doubting some cultural beliefs like some men turning into lions at night, only women with many grandchildren and of exemplary behaviour were the one's invited; childless women were excluded from the ceremony because it was believed that the gods gave children and if a woman was denied them, perhaps it meant she had not performed her role on earth. The senior daughters were invited, at their age, because they had stopped "the monthly trip to the moon" and were, therefore, considered spiritual. This is unfair to the young women who may possess the skills. Besides, a menstrual period for a woman is not a choice but natural, it is unjust for her to be discriminated just because she is in her periods.

The author studiously catalogues harmful traditional practices, which ought to have been done away with but are still alive and operational. This is possible because of the socialization process in most societies in Africa whereby the man is superior in all sorts of way to woman. The sex of a female, for example, divests her of personhood, and like the outcast, she is a second class citizen. The stigmatization, which a female child or a woman and the **osu** undergo, is the same, because the "stigma had passed from one generation to another and could not be dispelled" (The Moon Also Sets 105). In other words, the stigma of femaleness passes from mother to daughter that Mama Oby tells her, "The life of a woman in Isiakpu is doomed" (17). Her life at the University of Embakassi brings home to her what her mother tells her in Isiakpu. Both Isiakpu and the university operate a patriarchal system, where the men are in charge while the women bear the burden of being sex objects and motherhood.

In the patriarchal societies of the novel, women are the personal possessions or movable property of the men, who carve them up into territories which they ferociously defend. According to the narrator, they fight over women as their territories, because "Manhood, egos are all at stake, not to talk of the big backyards" (74).

The narrator makes it clear that "In Isiakpu being adult, female and single made you inconsequential" (Ogbu 6). Oby is aware of this disdain for the female sex as "her younger brother had more rights in the family than she did" (36). She knows that the customary practice is that she can "only acquire rights in her husband's when and if she got married" (36). The right of a married woman is also circumscribed by the Isiakpu tradition. When Papa Oby dies, her nuclear family's right to the family land is limited for she "only had a small farm, an acre of red soil" (3) where tough weeds thrive. Before she can get the infertile and small piece of land, she has to fight with her brothers-in-law to get it.

Also a woman, particularly a widow, is not expected to own any business that will give her freedom. Mama Oby's provision store at Eke Market in Isiakpu is razed by her brothers-in-law to teach her a lesson in humility. Her refusal to allow Ndubisi to marry Oby brings her the wrath of the patriarchs – Pa Okolo, Uncle Ben and Chief Ugwueze. Pa Okolo instructs Ben to destroy her economic base which gives her freedom to disobey them. This is possible because the patriarchal structure presents men as family heads. Women are traditionally considered to be properties of men.

As a widow, she cannot inherit her husband's property, whether he dies intestate or he has a will. Pa Okolo's ambition is to take over his late brother's house at Nsukka because, "A man's brothers and uncles had first claim to a man's assets, whether or not he had a wife and children" (16). In Isiakpu, "widows had no right" (14); it is only sons that can grant a widow status. If her sons are young, she still suffers until they are grown into adults; it is only then that her full rights are restored. Generally, the women's right to ownership of property in Isiakpu is as circumscribed as that of the outcasts. Chief Ugwueze's great grandfather suffers the same derogation as he is condemned to a life of servitude with his lineage in the shrine of Isiakpu. As outcasts, the "family had a very small piece of land. His great grandfather had no farm" (167) and they had to feed from the shrine of gods.

Assault and battery are two ways in which women are cowed down by their men. Mama Oby whose brothers-in-law summons to tell her of their decision to be inherited by Uncle Ben, who is described as a "loafer who had spent over 15 years moving from one Nigerian town to another with nothing to show for it" (9), is "forced to look down by his [Pa Okolo's] blazing eyes" (11). As if that is not enough intimidation, Pa Okolo who is angry that she is protesting the decision shuts her up with the threat, "I will not allow any woman brought into this family to bring shame to it" (11). When she protests the blackmail that she is Father Damian's lover, for daring to declare her innocence, she is humiliated and assaulted. The narrator says, "Uncle Ben, who had been sitting quietly, dashed across the room in a gesture that showed clearly he was going to slap Mama Oby back into respect but was restrained" (12). Uncle Eze, Uncle Ben's senior brother also encourages him with, "Teach her a lesson" (12). Despite her apology, she is sanctioned for, "Mama Oby was fined two white cockerels by her husband's brothers for being rude to Pa Okolo" (12). In fact, she is lucky to escape only with a mild sanction for perceived aggression against a patriarch, for if it were in the past, "she would have been declared missing and that would have been the end of the matter" (176).

As if the punishment from their husbands' families is not enough, married women are also punished by their fathers' kindred for any errant behaviour at their husbands'. They are excluded from sharing in the only time when women are ever honoured in Isiakpu. According to the narrator:

*The clan elders had a way of investigating complaints against their daughters, and when they set out to punish anyone, the decision was arrived at by consensus. It did not matter whose daughter it was. The punishment was often to exclude the errant woman from feasting and merry-making.*

It is not only in the remote agrarian village of Isiakpu that the lives of women are filled with thorns and brambles. The University of Embakassi is also unfriendly to women. The female students are preys to cultists, rapists and male lectures who abuse them sexually. Professor Akpanu Akpabio despite his level of education and his several titles, including that of a Jerusalem Pilgrim, tortures his foreign wife. As the Russian woman escapes from his house with her two children, she leaves this note which reveals the trauma and indignities she has been subjected to. She writes, "I have

forgiven you for all the emotional and physical abuse you have meted out on me, but I had to bring this misery to an end for our children's sake".

If the woman's husband dies, then her misery multiples for the widowhood practices are very degrading that she will never forget that her husband is no more. If the man somehow dies prematurely, she is "treated like a common criminal. She was accused of letting her husband die" (14). It is not only the widows whose husbands die in Isiakpu that get this type of inhuman treatment, even if the man lives in a metropolitan city like Lagos, the story is the same.

Some of the patriarchal institutions are also used to torture and degrade the womenfolk. **Akatakpa** is a masquerade cult which appears during the celebration of new yam festival in Isiakpu. These masquerades which are said to "symbolize the spirits of the forefathers of Isiakpu" (207) have preferential treatment for the two sexes. It is said that "Old men could converse with a masquerade, but older women sixty and above, would simply step aside, as a sign of respect if both happened to be on the same path" (207). However, **Akatakpa's** treatment of younger women is horrible. This cult is now an "instrument for settling rejected amorous advances and for teaching some people a lesson" (208). The masquerades degrade women like children. During the festivities, it occasionally hides in the "bush, off a footpath leading to the market and would spring on unsuspecting market women who would attempt to flee, screaming and yelling as it lashed at them" (208). It is this masquerade cult that Uncle Ben uses to set fire on Mama Oby's shop at Eke Market. The same patriarchal institution which oppresses women is seen in the libelous publication of *The Bee* in the University of Embakassi. Chris Onuora is the only male undergraduate who dares to protest the campus tabloid's malicious publication against Oby. Before students, he sets it on fire. This act is necessary because "The naked aggression against women was part of campus entertainment. Powerless and disorganized, they were used against each other. No one asked why. You simply endured or watched other people's pain and anguish" (275).

Another women's right which is violated in the world of *The Moon Also Sets* is the right to her reproductive health. This right is violated severally in Osi Ogbu's novel under evaluation. Mama Oby as a forty-year-old widow does not have the right to choose to be single and look after her children or to re-marry or to go through the customary practice of wife-inheritance. Pa Okolo and his brothers without her consent decide who inherits her. Before she is called to a meeting where the decision is conveyed to her, "The brothers had met a week earlier and decided that if she did not pick one of them as a husband, they would ask Uncle Ben to marry her" (9). This intended act is not an altruistic one for the widow. Calculating Pa Okolo has persuaded his younger ones that "it was in their interest to off-load Uncle Ben onto Mama Oby since they figured that she had inherited their brother's wealth" (9). In his ambition to become one of the titled men of Isiakpu, he is also willing to give out Oby's in marriage to Chief Ugwueze's son, Ndubuisi, without her consent. As Chief Ugwueze breaks the news of his proposal to Pa Okolo, he firmly assures him, "As head of this family, I promise to meet your expectations. She is my daughter, and I shall decide" (109). Oby as an educated young woman does not have a choice of a husband or her consent needed before her paternal uncle marries her off to a man with dented lineage and a questionable character, who is rumoured has "spent one year at a university in America and dropped out" (114).

In idolatrous Isiakpu, where tradition and modernity clash, and enlightened Embakassi university community, womanhood is synonymous with sexuality. In Isiakpu, Mama Oby tells her daughter that both adult female – widow and single – are fair game to the men. Uncle Ben who is treated contemptuously by his family for his effeminacy and indolence also tells Mama Oby, whom she is purported to have inherited, "I have come to do the necessary. I mean, eeh..." (35) at 9.30pm in

her house. Father Damian who is very corrupt and amorous also attempts to use Mama Oby as a sex object. Before she can rebuff his sexual advances, he has “planted a kiss on her lips. His hands grabbed her left breast and squeezed it” (20). Her refusal to be his lover, she suspects, earns punitive measures for he excommunicates the congregation on a pretext. The university community is not different from Isiakpu, girls are raped by students and their male lecturers. Oby falls a prey to Chike’s sexual advances only to be abandoned when she is pregnant for him.

In order to persuade Mama Oby to give her consent to her daughter’s marriage to Ndubisi, Pa Okolo reminds her that any uncircumcised woman in Isiakpu is unwholesome. He tells her, “If word gets out that she has not been cut, who in this village would want to marry her” (117)? The novelist vigorously explores through his female characters this traditional practice which ought to have been out-lawed. To the community that practices it, “it represents a rite of passage from childhood to adulthood” (204). In a patriarchal society, genital mutilation is done to ensure that women are not wayward. However, nobody bothers about their physical and psychological trauma as they are led to the abattoir. Elisabeth Bekers laments this primitive practice and calls it gender repression designed to curb women’s sexuality and ensure their submission. She further states that the consequences of this ranges from “post-operative inflammation and hemorrhage to chronic infections and lasting sexual frigidity” (2010 368). This psychological trauma and the medical risks of female circumcision can be glimpsed from Mama Oby’s account of her friend’s experience. She says, “She nearly bled to death. Years after this incident, she still avoids sex because it is often a very painful experience for her” (206).

The same violation of the right to women’s reproductive right is also experienced in the university. When Oby gets pregnant and Chike wants her to abort the foetus, she refuses. She prefers to keep it as the mother has earlier advised her that abortion is a sin against God and against humanity. However, she says, “I am only saying that I would expect you to have the baby if you were to find yourself in such a situation. I could raise the baby if you didn’t have the time, that’s all I am saying” (192). Oby is ready to keep the baby, but Chike who is responsible for it insists, “Well, you have to have an abortion. I think that is our only option” (298). When she refuses to do so, he hatches a plan with Okoro who has impregnated many women and would have had “God-knows-how-many children” (300) to abort her pregnancy without her consent. According to Okoro’s explanation, the concoction works in this manner:

*Touch-and-go dissolved completely in water or any other drink and was therefore especially appropriate in this case. Okoro had employed it under similar circumstances and it had worked perfectly well. Up till today, the girl still thought she had a miscarriage.*

Chike tricks Oby into drinking it and it induces an abortion. However, she almost loses her life in the process and has to be taken to a medical doctor to evacuate the fetus. In order to ensure the procurement of the illegal abortion, “Okoro did not take chances. He asks for a potent one”.

Other rights of the women which are constitutionally guaranteed but are derogated from in the novel are their rights to the freedom of expression and peaceful assembly and association which are provided for in sections 39 and 40 of the constitution respectively. Despite the humiliating scenario in Pa Okolo’s house for Mama Oby, she refrains from expressing her opinion because “she knew that now was not the time to speak her mind” (10). When she express her opinion about wife-inheritance, Pa Okolo tells her angrily, “Shut up and let me finish” (10). Also if a man in Isiakpu dies, whether at home or outside, she does not have the freedom of expression to ask her brothers-in-law why they are confiscating the deceased’s property. If she dares to ask any question, she will be accused of killing him. Therefore, from Mama Oby’s experience as a widow,

she is of the view that “The only option was to keep quiet” (17) so that the widow will not be condemned of sacrilege. Mama Oby’s insistence that her daughter will marry a man whose ancestry is stigmatized compels Pa Okolo to tell her, “Right now your actions are dictated by a clash of hormones. It is the worst thing that can happen to a woman”(16). In rural patriarchal Isiakpu, it is unheard of that any woman can hold an opinion and freely express her ideas. Oby’s mother is sanctioned, as usual, two “cocks and a gallon of palm wine for not bringing Oby well enough to respect her elders” (34). It is unheard of that Oby whom Uncle Ben pesters for money can ever raise her voice against his aggressive demands. This is possible in patriarchal societies where women do not have any opinions.

The women of Isiakpu cannot also freely associate with other women. In the world of the novel, barren women are excluded from the feasting, dancing and merry-making when the women of the clan are honoured. This derogation from their right to freedom of association is “because it was believed that the gods gave children and if a woman was denied them, perhaps it meant she had not performed her role on earth” (165-166). Married daughters whom her male kindred perceive to be recalcitrant are also not invited as a punishment for their misbehaviour in their husbands’ families. The Isiakpu women’s meeting which Mama Oby and Mama Ijeoma organize to protest the violence Akatakpa metes on the women fails woefully because:

*Every woman was warned by her husband to dissociate from the meeting and the protest. The men had met and resolved that if there was anything wrong with the tradition, they themselves would deal with it. They would not allow women to dictate to them what to do, to stampede or force them to act as if they were a bunch of spineless men.*

Among the people of Isiakpu, a woman is called as mother of her first child, a childless marriage for a woman is a meaningless life. The society has no sympathy for a barren woman; the men of Isiakpu are intolerant to barren women. However, children born out of wedlock have no place in society. An adult female who does not get married is regarded inconsequential.

In Isiakpu, a woman has no mind of her own. All decisions, including those affecting women are made by men. The chief, for instance, takes a decision to have his son marry Oby without seeking Oby’s consent.

Recognition in the homestead in Isiakpu for a woman is by giving birth to male off springs, heir to the family property upon the death of the father.

Upon the death of a man, his wife had to be inherited by one of his brothers. A man believed to have no control over his wife is never respected among his peers.

A woman whose husband dies young is accused of killing him and has to go through a lengthy period of harsh treatment for letting him die; a woman who gives birth during the mandatory one year of morning faces the full wrath of the people of Isiakpu while no harm would come to the man responsible for such a pregnancy. Fellow women are used to punish the offenders.

Pa Okolo draws a weekly schedule for his wives to shares his bed but does not strictly adhere to it; without explanation, he disregards the schedule in favour of his youngest wife. The second wife lost her favourite status when a newcomer arrived; she felt extremely frustrated and started long-distance trading.

During cultural functions meant to cleanse one who had desecrated the Ndu Nwa Agu clan by doubting some cultural beliefs like some men turning into lions at night, only women with many grandchildren and of exemplary behaviour were the one's invited; childless women were excluded from the ceremony because it was believed that the gods gave children and if a woman was denied them, perhaps it meant she had not performed her role on earth. The senior daughters were invited, at their age, because they had stopped "the monthly trip to the moon" and were, therefore, considered spiritual. This is unfair to the young women who may possess the skills. Besides, a menstrual period for a woman is not a choice but natural, it is unjust for her to be discriminated just because she is in her periods.

Osi Ogbu in *The Moon Also Sets* shows that women ought to be seen as both the victims and/or victimizers. The patriarchal society which oppresses women and derogates from their rights cannot function successfully without a huge support from the womenfolk. For instance, the obnoxious widowhood practices in the novel which violate their rights to freedom from torture, inhuman treatment and indignity are shown to be operated and sustained by women. Mama Oby recalls that when her own grandfather died prematurely, her grandmother was treated like a criminal by the women. Not only that she is accused of letting her husband die, but:

*For seven local weeks (28 days) after his death, she was kept in isolation, clean-shaven and dressed in ugly black. She sat on a mat less than two square feet, on a bare floor with female relatives in attendance (14-15).*

As if this torture is not enough for the widow who is in mourning, for seven weeks she stays without bathing and only sneaks out through a back door to relieve herself. And it is the womenfolk, her sisters-in-law or the umuada, daughters of the family of the deceased who exert this degrading punishment, because they believe she has killed their brother. The narrator reinforces this culpability again and again that "It was the umuada and her fellow women who meted out this retribution .... As the umuada mourned their brother they denigrated his wife for allowing him to die" (15). As if the indignity is not enough yet for their victim during the mourning period, she has to be led to the market carrying imaginary wares. The victimizers of the widow, the umuada, walk ahead of her in a procession, singing a song which suggests that "the dead man's wife had partially atoned for her sins" (15). At the market square, the degradation of the widow by other women continues unabated because:

...she displayed the imaginary wares as market women poured scorn on her. She acted as both buyer and seller. She was compelled to talk to herself as part of the ritual (15).

The ordeal the widow whose husband dies prematurely in unscientific Isiakpu is calculated "as a deterrent to those who might be inclined to eliminate their husbands in order to enjoy his wealth" (15). And it is the women who organize and enforce this obnoxious custom against one of them.

This degradation and torture does not happen in Mama Oby's grandmother's period alone. When Papa Oby died, she also experiences this custom, but "Things were slightly different" (15). However, the "more they seemed to have changed, the more they remained the same" (15). Though she wears white attire instead of the black adorned by her grandmother; the 28-day seclusion has also been shortened to a week; the bizarre market outing has been done away with; yet, the "one year mourning period was still observed" (15). The most humiliating and the most traumatizing of her experiences during the one year mourning period is her early pregnancy during her husband's demise. In Isiakpu where there is no DNA test for paternity of a child, the custom is that it is an abomination for a widow to get pregnant during the one year mourning period. And for the

enforcement of this custom, which is degrading, “Women counted the days” (23). For this derogation from a widow’s right:

*No harm would come to the man responsible for such a pregnancy. But woe betide the woman who allowed it to happen. And as always, women, aunts, sisters-in-law and grandmothers would be used to punish the “offender” (23).*

Apart from this, women’s complicity in the violation of other women’s right to their reproductive health also helps in the sustenance of the patriarchal system which they complain about. During the genital mutilation of the female clitoris so that she will never experience any orgasm, it is the women who carry the slaughtering, and not the men. The only duty the men perform for them is to pursue and catch young girls who try to escape from the circumcision, drag them back as they kick and struggle. For Mama Oby’s friend’s experience which she recounts to Oby, “They held her legs apart as the old women sliced off a piece of her private parts” (206). Apart from the women carrying out the circumcision, they are also part of the group that oppose the cultural practice should be stopped. The narrator implicates the women when she says:

*But this is a very conservative society and the practice has persisted because there are men, diehard traditionalists supported by a handful of women, who insist that it has virtue. We tried to pressurize the late chief to outlaw the practice. I know we could have won. But by the time we had two meetings, we had lost the momentum as some of the women lost courage (204).*

It is obvious that with the connivance of some women, the lack of courage by others, the custom which would have been outlawed continues. The Isiakpu women’s insistence on the continuation of the female circumcision is perhaps their own contribution to their tradition.

Again, women encourage the traditions that derogate from women’s right to freedom of expression and freedom to hold opinions. Mama Oby does not tell her some of the problems she is going through, particularly with her paternal uncles. She is frustrated by her mother’s attitude as it seems to suggest that an unmarried woman, no matter her age, “was immature or that she [her mother] subscribed to the tradition that excluded women from family matters because they did not belong there” (37).

The greatest problem, which women have that make it impossible for them to end the violations of their rights, is lack of bonding. This is principally due to petty jealousies among them and lack of determination. Mama Ijeoma is instrumental to Mama Oby’s brothers-in-law insisting that she must be inherited by one of them. She is the one who concocts the story that Mama Oby is Father Damian’s lover. Her betrayal of Mama Oby to Pa Okolo is because:

*Mama Ijeoma was dressed to kill – often in very loud, discordant colours. She considered herself the best dressed woman in the village and did not like what she saw as challenges from Mama Oby (30).*

The lack of bonding in women can also be seen from their unsuccessful attempt to demonstrate against the Akatakpa, and their failure to persuade their traditional ruler in Isiakpu to proscribe the customary practice of circumcision of girls. The story is the same in the University of Embakassi where The Bee in order to enforce its brand of morality humiliates the girls; yet, the women, “Powerless and disorganized, they were used against each other” (275).



The women are also victimizers of their fellow women, because they will never offer help to others who are in need like the men. Okoro offers all the assistance Chike needs when he has any problems. He readily steals the artwork of the tabloid in order to save his friend and her girlfriend from being scandalized by The Bee. He is the one who travels to Aba to procure the concoctions with which to abort Oby's pregnancy. Surprisingly, when he is about to face a criminal charge, he does not want to implicate Okoro as an accomplice. When Chris mentions him, he tells him stoically, "Please leave Okoro out of this. I am responsible for everything" (306). Most women cannot do it for other women. Uncle Amechi's wife, for example, even though she knows that her sister-in-law is a widow with five children, does not allow the brother to give her much money. When he wants to give Oby's brother a thousand naira, "She took the money and counted it herself. She divided it into two and gave him back five hundred naira" (48). Also Ada and Fumi, who are older students and Oby's room-mates, decide not to tell her what they know about Chike's huge penis. In Ada's opinion, "I don't want to play mother to anyone" (92). And Fumi decides, "If Ada was determined that Oby should not be told what they knew about Chike, it would be so" (92). However, the two go behind Oby to negotiate the price they will be paid in order to persuade her to be Chike's lover.

Osi Ogbu in *The Moon Also Sets* suggests that if women intend to liberate themselves from the traditional practices which are harmful and degrading to them, apart from recourse to legislation that protect their rights, they can also take the following measures.

Defiance on the part of a woman can be helpful. Mama Oby even though she is a widow is able to resist her brothers-in-law's proposal that Uncle Ben inherits her. At the meeting they summon her in Pa Okolo's house, the narrator says, "Under the surface of Mama Oby's placidity lay an indefatigable spirit. Her in-laws knew this. But they had to kill that inner spirit. They were not expected to give up. It is their social obligation not to give up" (12). Despite their several sanctions on her, they are unsuccessful. When Uncle Ben comes to her house to sleep with her, she humiliates him out with, "Foolish man if you come back here again, I will circumcise you a second time. If you think that you have balls, do come back" (35). She is also able to defy the head of the patriarchal family, Pa Okolo, who abuses everybody and manages to keep them under control. Before he goes to inform her about Chief Ugwueze's proposal for her son to marry Oby, it is obvious that he is not comfortable. This is because:

*He had not slept very well himself because he was not sure how Mama Oby would react. He had spent part of the night working and reworking the anticipated conversation. He knew Mama Oby would not be an easy nut to crack (111).*

She is also defiant of Father Damian who wants her as a lover, when he kisses her and tries to caress her, "She shoved him away so hard that he landed on all fours on the small table, then crashing with the books on to the floor" (20). She refuses to succumb to his amorous desire even when she is aware that the whole Christians in Ishi-ugwu are being punished for his unrequited love.

Mama Oby is not only defiant, but she is also sensible and has an insight into people's behaviour. She is aware of Mama Ijeoma's treachery and disregards her offer of help and advice. When she comes to advise her to buy contraceptives for Oby as she leaves for the university, she thinks of her as a "double-edged sword and could cut both ways" (57). Again as she sends her son to go to Onitsha and tell her brother about Oby's admission, she says, "his wife is a hard nut to crack" (14). She is also aware that Pa Okolo is a very manipulative man and Chief Ugwueze cannot be trusted and she keeps away from the two men. In fact, she rejects Pa Okolo's message from Chief

Ugwueze and rejects Chief Ugwueze's monetary gift after the arson which gutted her store at Eke Market. Oby resembles her mother in her defiance and that is why she is able to escape from Professor Akpanu Akpabio's sexual overtures. She is also able to bring justice to her mother when her store is burnt down by Uncle Ben.

On the contrary, other female characters like Mama Ijeoma and Ada are extremely defiant and insensible. Mama Ijeoma who is believed to be wayward is not as bad as people think, but she is not bothered about people's opinions about her conduct. Her extremity is seen in her defiance of the elders of Isiakpu and their customs. When Father Damian baptizes Obeta who refuses to swear an oath, according to the custom of the people, when he is accused of killing his nephew, she is the only Christian who associates with him and defies the community's sanctions against him. In fact, Mama Oby briefs her about her role in the dispute between the priest and the other Christians he excommunicates. She says, "Mama Ijeoma has been Fr Damian's dedicated emissary. He passes all the instructions and warning through her and she cherishes playing the role" (198). Ada, even though an undergraduate, sees her relationship with any man as a cash-and-carry business. Pa Okolo's second wife is also defiant. When she sees that she is out of favour in the politics of a polygamous family, rumour has it that she has adulterous affairs during her travels, "She carried on, though, as if none of this bothered her" (103).

Education is one other instrument that can liberate women from oppressive customs that derogate from their rights. Mama Oby is aware that Oby's university education is an advantage to the family. And she rejoices that "a great thing has happened to this family. Let's not slight it. Thank you for placing me above my mates" (42). Pa Okolo, though a rural and uneducated man, also appreciates that education is very important, and "also brought two gallons of palm wine in demonstration of his support" (51) during her send-off party. It is because of Oby's education that Chief Ugwueze sends a proposal to Mama Oby for his son to marry her daughter. It is also with Oby's education that she has the courage to report the arson that destroys her mother's stall at the market. She refuses to be deterred by the collection of bribes by the police men the inspector sends to investigate the crime. It is also with education that young men now detest girls who are circumcised because they are frigid during sexual intercourse. They do not see the custom as instilling virtues in them.

Metropolitan life is one of the things that have liberated women. Mama Oby and Mama Ijeoma have both lived in the city, and "Their exposure to the city had led them to have a common appreciation and disdain for certain things" (13). One of the things they disdain is Akatakpa's violence on the young women of Isiakpu that they organized an aborted demonstration against the cult. Pa Okolo is aware of this influence of metropolitan lifestyle on their tradition and he says several times to Mama Oby, "I am aware that many of you who have lived in those rotten cities have lost respect for our tradition and the elders" (11). It is also possible for Chief Ugwueze to whittle down the ostracism against the osu caste system in Isiakpu because of the wealth he acquires from his sojourn in Lagos.

Finally, the most important succour for the enforcement of the derogated rights of the women is the use of the criminal justice system. Oby is able to bring the conspirators to justice by reporting the arson which is a punishable offence. By the diligent investigation of an honest police officer, Pa Okolo commits suicide and:

*Uncle Ben was arraigned at the Magistrate's Court and sentenced to twelve months in prison, with hard labour. Soon afterwards, the chief left Isiakpu for what was purportedly an extended business trip abroad. This trip was an escape strategy designed to let matters cool down. If he was implicated,*

*he needed the time to deal with the matter at the highest level. He was not seen in the village for close to six months.*

However, the escape of Chief Ugwueze who masterminds the arson seems to suggest that the big criminals who are well-connected or wealthy are not brought to justice when they violate the rights of women. And those who are punished, like Uncle Ben, escape with light jail sentences. Chike is also arrested for procuring illegal abortion on Oby. This arrest also suggests that the women ought to report to the right authorities when their constitutional rights are derogated from. They should go beyond docilely accepting the violation because, “A will in Isiakpu is a useless piece of paper” (17), and “If you take your husband’s family to court, are you and your children going to live in the sky” (17)?

They should bear in mind that those who run the patriarchal system that derogate from their human rights and fundamental freedoms are also afraid of the law. Pa Okolo who has the ambition to be one of the titled men of Isiakpu has to commit suicide because:

*If he [Uncle Ben] implicates me and I go to prison at this age, what would the society think of me? I would still not be accepted by the council of elders even if the prison term was one week (231).*

Osi Ogbu in *The Moon Also Sets* shows that his primary interest is in the violations of women’s rights and freedoms. In the world of the novel- traditional Isiakpu and modern University of Embakassi - which the characters inhabit, women are still crushed and bowed under the violence, which is operated from patriarchal societies and institutions. However, female complicity which sustains such oppression and degradation is a reality in the novel. He believes that it is the women’s duty to extricate themselves from customs and practices that threaten their survival. And they can only successfully do this when they are armed with legislations, which punish the violators of their guaranteed rights and freedoms, though the wealthy and the highly connected may seem to escape from justice.

### **Cultural clash (tradition versus modernity)**

Before the advent of Christianity and the so-called modernity, information was exchanged over a keg of palm-wine at the village square – the **otobo**. Morality, respect for elders and other values were taught to children through folklore and role play; mothers bonded and learnt the tricks of child rearing from one another. During the full moon, the **otobo** was transformed into a theatre; drama, songs, dances, wrestling and story-telling competitions were staged there. The brain-tasking village chess, the *eeche*, was used to determine the brightest villager. Inter-community competitions were held in the **otobo**. Winners were highly respected, became famous and honoured.

All the above are no more. Anything that now highest around tradition is deemed anti-Christian; the **otobo** which used to be the rendezvous for many communities is no more. The inter-community competitions that aimed at gorging unity, promoting talent and preserving the cultural heritage are long gone. This demise is blamed on the Christian religion which requires that the reverend Father first be consulted if any event should take place. A culture of individualism has instead cropped up; Catholics and Protestants do not mix freely; Christians and non-Christians can no longer interact even for their own benefit. The new culture is, therefore, a strange one that has caused divisionism and alienated the natives from their hitherto cherished cultural norms.

The church is in direct conflict with the traditional practices and customs of the people of Isiakpu. Obete, a man accused of poisoning his brother’s son, Ezekiel Nwaeze, disappears without swearing

before the alusi to prove his innocence and Father Damian declares him a full member of the Association and instructs all Christians from Isiakpu to make sure no harm came to him. Mama Oby remarks that Obete's actions would tantamount to him being ostracized by the whole village but now Father Damian wants to split the entire community because he is behaving as if he does not understand the customs of the people of Isiakpu. When asked to reconsider his decision, Father Damian excommunicated all the Christian faithfuls, except for Obete and Mama Ijeoma. The Father had gone ahead to instruct all the Catholics to pass through Obete's house on their way to church every Sunday as the only way of confirming that they had, indeed contravened the ostracizing decree.

### **Corruption**

Mama Oby says everything defies logic in Nigeria. One is never sure when to queue and when to jump the queue because a lot depends on who one knows, and one's understanding in society. She thinks her brother, Amechi who lives in Onitsha could help "unlock some door" with money to help Oby get a university admission.

Mama Ijeoma's suggestion that Oby should use her charm to influence a lecturer at the University of Nigeria to get admission there is a reflection of a corrupt society.

Mark observes that there are blame games between the government and the oil companies over pollution caused to the environment in the process of drilling and processing oil. This is blamed on corruption that is prevalent in the society, "not only do they institutionalize corruption; they give it baptismal names such as "settlement". The nationals are left with no option in the messy country where everything is upside down; quack doctors, quack professors, quack lawyers, quack army generals. When a local environment conservation group mounted the publicity campaign to sensitize the people of Embakassi on the dangers of pollution, the demonstration was dispersed by armed policemen.

As a junior immigration officer, chief Ugwueze made a lot of money from illegal aliens and companies that hired expatriates beyond the allocated government quota. When he campaigned for the position of chief after the death of the last chief, many people were upset and felt that he was wasting his time. Oiled by his wealth, his campaign was well organized and he won the elections. He is therefore, a symbol of corruption in the novel.

The chief being an **osu** (an out caste), he bribed his way to chieftdom, "...by the time the chief had made his late night or early morning rounds with his generous envelopes among the elders and the opinion leaders in the town, people were talking from both sides of their cheeks" page 160.

Later when the wrath of the gods started acting upon those who were involved in the chief's affairs, "those who had received envelopes offered sacrifices to appease the gods. Many gave away the money in an unusual burst of generosity. The envelope handlers, those who had eaten from the chief, could be seen sweating all the time-even early in the morning". The effect of this corruption is summarized in the proverb, "no one should play with the tail of a lion whether dead or alive." Page 161.

Agu, their father, was asleep but not dead. The lion had ceased to appear for some time because the elders who held the **ofo**, the symbol of authority and justice had been compromised.

The chief bribes the police officers who are investigating the arson case in which himself, Pa Okolo and Uncle Ben are involved. The chief then goes to Mama Oby, pretending to offer sympathies

but tries to give her a large brown envelope full of money but she humiliates the chief with a total rejection.

### **Moral degeneration**

During active semester time at the Embakassi University, men come in large numbers at the Marry Slessor Hall to see their girlfriends. “senior girl” fought to be placed in this hostel. New Bethel, however, was shunned because it had only born-again students; men were uncomfortable visiting this hostel because some had been dragged into prayer and fellowship sessions, kicking and protesting.

Still at the University of Embakassi, Oby observes that the library is more of a lover’s den than a reading hall.

Most cars outside Mary Slessor Hall normally vanish by about 11:00pm on Fridays, usually with an additional occupant who is normally brought back on Sunday evening; Chike calls the hall a slaughter house.

Okoro reveals to his friends his sex secrets with his girlfriends, “her kicks and cries of passion simply drove me crazy”. Chris, meanwhile, shares his story of the girl he took to a room he had booked. During sexual intercourse he asked her whether she was cumming and she opened her eyes, pushed him aside and asked him who was coming, and if he was expecting. Someone else. This casual sex that these university students engage in reveals the moral degeneration prevalent in society.

Chike engages in a reckless sexual encounter with a university girl and this is reported in “The Bee” that the girl feared the huge size of his organ and ran away.

Pa Okolo tells Mama Oby that the Igwe of Isiakpu wants her daughter to get married to his son because the son is in league with **oyibo** girls from America who even wear underpants in the public. Besides, they only eat in hotels and cannot cook the native food.

The chiefs’ son, Ndubisi, who is said to have been in America for eight years, is said to instead be working in one of the pubs where women dance in the nude.

Chike’s conversation with Oby as the latter dresses up for the formers handover ceremony reveal Father Damian as a degenerate with an insatiable appetite for women. He recalls an incident when the Father and two catholic sisters went to his apartment unannounced one time when he was still teaching at Asaba; the man of God increased the volume of the cassette player and breathlessly held one of the sisters to electrifying dance moves.

The second nun, feeling lonely, invited Chike, pulled him up to fondle and caress her breasts. The large bronze crucifix dangling near the sister’s breasts got him scared. The sister instead held him so tightly close to her that he almost fainted.

Professor Akpanu asks for sexual favours from his female students to give them good grades; he exchanges sex for marks; something totally against his work ethics.

### **Hypocrisy**

It is an act of religious hypocrisy for Father Damian to lure his follower (Mama Oby) into lovemaking and worst of all, attempt to assault her sexually. This shows that he lives a pretentious life of a man of God yet in reality he is lustful for members of his flock.

Father Damian lacks the moral authority to preach about morality because he had engaged in an act of immorality because he had engaged in an act of immorality in chapter two when he forcefully kisses Mama Oby and grabs her breasts.

It is also hypocritical to first pretend to be against the young man who walks out of a boring sermon then later on praises him and head blessings on him after he has made a generous donation to the church.

Father Damian is supposed to uphold high moral standards but his moral credentials are wanting; Chike narrates to Oby an incident one time when Father Damian promised to have a good time with two catholic sisters. It is reported that he went to Chike's house and started to dance vigorously with one of the sisters to music from Chike's cassette players; the cleric then sneaked into Chike's bedroom with the sister, leaving Chike with the second sister to keep vigil over a few bottles of beer. It is a clear manifestation that these religious leaders are always in the habit of sexual encounters, something contrary to the catholic faith that they claim to promote.

### **Women emancipation**

Oby's ambition is to join the university and pursue a course that could lead her to a career that she would use to counter the traditional norms that discriminates against women in Nigeria.

She hates Isaac Eze, her friends, for having no ambition in life. She is not satisfied working as an auxiliary teacher; she has a bigger picture about her life. She rejected love proposals from all the men of Isiakpu because education was top most in her mind.

Mama Oby vehemently refuses to be conscripted into marrying a man she does not love; she rejects the cultural demand of wife inheriting after the death of her husband in preference to raising her children single-handedly, if need be.

Oby tells Chris at dinner, "Our generation will teach you guys a lesson. The world is unfair to women". Oby says this because she had developed a penchant for fighting for women's causes whenever she could. Since her father's death, her mother's experience at the hands of her uncles had re-enforced her belief that women should fight for more power, and recognition. She did not understand how one should be made to plead for what was rightfully theirs just because one was a woman. She wonders why a woman's rights, including the rights to her own body, are inferior to a man's wishes.

Mama Oby and Mama Ijeoma organize other women to reject the archaic cultural practice of **Akatapka** much as they meet resistance from the male folks who discourage their women from attending the meetings organized by the two women.

### **Narrative techniques in *The Moon Also Sets***

- Use of flashbacks
- Irony
- Use of Proverbs and sayings
- Allusions
- Use of music and dance
- Description
- Third person omniscient narrator
- Dialogue
- Use of letters (Oby's admission letter and Mama Oby's letter to her daughter in chapter twenty-four and use of pidgin English, for example page 141-142)

**Questions for discussion**

- 1 Discuss the injustices against women that Osi presents in *The Moon Also Sets*.
- 2 How effectively does Osi Ogbu use setting in the novel *The Moon Also Sets*?
- 3 Discuss the significance of Mark's statement that "The Moon also sets"
- 4 Discuss Osi Ogbu's use of oral literature in the novel, *The Moon Also Sets*.
- 5 "*The Moon Also Sets* is entirely about the injustices against women in the Nigeria society". Discuss the validity of the above statement with close reference to the novel.