AWKA JOURNAL OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERARY STUDIES (AJELLS)

Volume 13 Number 2
June, 2026

Irony, Satire, and Iconoclasm in Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God* and Mongo Beti's *The Poor Christ of Bomba*

Khaleel Bakheet Khaleel Ismail
Department of English Language, College of Sciences and Humanities
Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz University, KSA
k.ismail@psau.edu.sa
ORCID: 0000-0002-1031-2687

&

Farouk Abdullahi
Department of English and Literary Studies
Faculty of Arts and Islamic Studies, Bayero University, Kano, Nigeria
fabdullahi.eng@buk.edu.ng

Abstract

This paper investigates the use of irony, satire, and iconoclasm in Chinua Achebe's Arrow of God and Mongo Beti's The Poor Christ of Bomba as critical narrative strategies for interrogating colonial and missionary domination in Africa. The study further demonstrates that iconoclasm functions as a significant mechanism through which indigenous belief systems are challenged and transformed, producing cultural disruption, psychological displacement, and new forms of negotiation between traditional and colonial structures. Achebe's tragic irony highlights the vulnerabilities and internal tensions of indigenous authority under colonial pressure, while Beti's satire critiques the arrogance and contradictions of missionary power. The study adopts a qualitative research approach based on close textual analysis of the two primary novels. The analysis is guided by the theoretical insights of postcolonial theory, to explore issues of colonial power, ideological domination, epistemic violence, mimicry, hybridity, and the contested formation of identity under colonial conditions. The findings reveal that irony and satire operate beyond their literary functions as powerful forms of counter-discourse that

expose the contradictions, moral inconsistencies, and instability of colonial and missionary authority. The study concludes that both novels challenge simplified notions of colonial domination and resistance by presenting colonial encounters as complex spaces shaped by ambivalence, adaptation, and unintended consequences. Thus, Arrow of God and The Poor Christ of Bomba provide enduring critiques of cultural imperialism while revealing the ongoing struggles surrounding authority, identity, and self-definition in postcolonial African societies.
Keywords: Irony, Hegemony, Satire, Iconoclasm, Postcolonial Theory, Ambivalence

Introduction

The late 19th and early 20th centuries marked the height of European colonialism in Africa, characterized by the partitioning of the continent and the imposition of foreign rule. Alongside colonial administrators, Christian missionaries sought to convert African populations, often viewing indigenous beliefs as primitive and in need of replacement by Christianity. The activities of Colonialism and missionaries disrupted traditional societies, leading to significant cultural, social, and religious changes. The imposition of Western values often led to the marginalization of indigenous practices and the erosion of cultural identities.

Consequently, African postcolonial literature has consistently functioned as a critical repository for examining and challenging the historical, cultural, and psychological impacts of colonial domination. Among its most powerful narrative strategies are irony, satire, and iconoclasm, devices that enable writers to expose the contradictions, hypocrisies, and violence embedded in colonial and missionary enterprises. Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God* and Mongo Beti's *The Poor Christ of Bomba* stand as two seminal texts that deploy these strategies with remarkable sophistication, offering sustained critiques of colonial power, religious intrusion, and the destabilization of indigenous authority. Through their

refined narrative structures, both novels dismantle colonial claims to moral and civilizational superiority while revealing the ambivalent, often tragic consequences of cultural encounter (Achebe, 1987; Beti, 1971).

Set in distinct colonial contexts, British Nigeria and French Cameroon, *Arrow of God* and *The Poor Christ of Bomba* dramatize the encounter between African societies and European imperial systems through the lens of religious conflict. Christianity, presented as a vehicle of salvation and progress, becomes in both novels a tool of epistemic domination and cultural erasure. Achebe and Beti reveal how missionary discourse operates alongside colonial administration to undermine indigenous cosmologies, fracture communal cohesion, and reconfigure authority structures (Said, 1978; Fanon, 1963). Nevertheless, crucially, neither novelist presents colonialism as a simple binary of oppressor and oppressed. Instead, they foreground the internal contradictions, negotiations, and unintended consequences that emerge when indigenous leaders and communities respond to colonial intrusion.

Irony functions centrally in both texts as a mode of exposing the instability of power. In *Arrow of God*, Achebe employs tragic irony to show how Ezeulu's unshakable fidelity to ritual authority paradoxically accelerates the collapse of the very religious order he seeks to preserve (Irele, 2001; Nnoromele, 2000). In *The Poor Christ of Bomba*, Beti adopts corrosive irony and overt satire to ridicule missionary arrogance, revealing the gulf between professed Christian ideals and the lived realities of colonial violence (Gikandi, 2001; Mireku-Gyimah, 2013). Satire, in both works, becomes a counter-discursive weapon that strips colonial and missionary authority of its moral legitimacy by rendering it absurd, excessive, and self-contradictory.

Iconoclasm, understood here as the destruction or denigration of indigenous religious symbols and epistemologies, emerges as a

central thematic concern in the novels. Missionary efforts to dismantle African spiritual systems are depicted not merely as theological disputes but as assaults on cultural memory, identity, and social cohesion. Achebe portrays iconoclasm as gradual and internally mediated, while Beti presents it as abrupt, violent, and humiliating. In both cases, the result is cultural disintegration rather than spiritual renewal, confirming Fanon's (1963) argument that colonialism seeks to empty the colonized subject of historical and cultural content. This paper aims to depict the complex interplay of irony, satire, and iconoclasm in postcolonial African literature, which serves as a powerful vehicle for critiquing the legacy of colonialism and the cultural upheavals it wrought. Moreover, the analysis of the primary texts is informed by postcolonial theoretical perspectives, particularly the ideas of Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, and Homi K. Bhabha, which provide a critical framework for examining colonial power, identity formation, and cultural negotiation.

Fanon’s analysis of colonial violence and psychological alienation provides a framework for understanding the traumatic effects of missionary iconoclasm. Said’s concept of Orientalism elucidates the epistemic hierarchies that authorize colonial misrepresentation of African cultures, while Bhabha’s notions of ambivalence, mimicry, and hybridity illuminate the unstable, negotiated nature of colonial encounters (Bhabha, 1994; Said, 1993). By reading Achebe and Beti through these theoretical lenses, this paper argues that irony, satire, and iconoclasm function not merely as aesthetic devices but as critical modes of resistance that expose the limits of colonial authority and the complexities of African responses to imperial domination.

Objectives of the Study

This study seeks to:

1. Examine how irony and satire function as narrative strategies for critiquing colonial and missionary authority in *Arrow of God* and *The Poor Christ of Bomba*.

2. Analyze the representation of iconoclasm as a mechanism of cultural disruption and religious conflict in both novels.
3. Explore how Achebe and Beti portray the ambivalence, contradictions, and unintended consequences of indigenous responses to colonial intrusion.
4. Situate the novels within a postcolonial theoretical framework in order to illuminate broader questions of power, resistance, identity, and cultural survival in colonial and postcolonial Africa.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its integrated comparative approach to two foundational African novels, often studied separately but sharing profound thematic and ideological affinities. By analyzing *Arrow of God* and *The Poor Christ of Bomba* within a unified postcolonial framework, the study deepens critical understanding of how African writers employ irony, satire, and iconoclasm to interrogate colonial modernity. It contributes to postcolonial scholarship by highlighting the internal fractures, moral ambiguities, and cultural negotiations that complicate simplistic narratives of resistance or domination. Furthermore, the study underscores the enduring relevance of these texts in contemporary debates about cultural imperialism, religious intolerance, and the struggle for self-definition in postcolonial societies.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in postcolonial theory, drawing primarily on the works of Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, and Homi K. Bhabha, whose complementary insights provide a robust framework for analyzing irony, satire, and iconoclasm in Achebe's and Beti's novels. Postcolonial theory examines the cultural, political, and psychological effects of colonialism, emphasizing how imperial power operates not only through military and economic

domination but also through discourse, religion, and knowledge production (Ashcroft et al., 2002).

Frantz Fanon's writings are central to understanding the psychic and cultural violence depicted in both novels. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon (1963) argues that colonialism systematically destroys indigenous institutions and replaces them with alien structures that generate alienation and internal conflict. His analysis of the colonized intellectual and traditional authority figures illuminates Ezeulu's tragic predicament in *Arrow of God*, where rigid adherence to ritual authority under colonial pressure results in communal suffering. Fanon's earlier work, *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), further explains the psychological fractures experienced by colonized subjects who internalize colonial values, a process vividly dramatized through characters such as Oduche in Achebe and the converts in Beti.

Edward Said's concept of Orientalism provides a critical lens for examining the epistemic violence underlying missionary and colonial discourse. Said (1978) contends that imperial power sustains itself by producing reductive representations of colonized cultures as irrational, primitive, and morally deficient. In both novels, missionaries and colonial administrators operate within such discursive frameworks, dismissing African religions as superstition and legitimizing iconoclastic intervention. Said's later work, *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), is particularly relevant in revealing how cultural texts expose the complicity of religion and literature in sustaining imperial domination.

Homi K. Bhabha's theoretical contributions complicate binary models of colonizer and colonized by emphasizing ambivalence, mimicry, and hybridity. In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha (1994) argues that colonial authority is inherently unstable because it depends on the partial imitation of imperial norms by the colonized. This framework is crucial for understanding the ironic

outcomes of Ezeulu's decision to send his son to missionary school and the performative nature of Christian conversion in *The Poor Christ of Bomba*. Mimicry, rather than signaling submission, becomes a site of disruption that exposes the incoherence of colonial power.

Supplementing these foundational theorists are African literary critics such as Abiola Irele and Simon Gikandi, whose scholarship contextualizes Achebe and Beti within African intellectual traditions. Irele (2001) emphasizes the symbolic and ethical dimensions of authority in African literature, while Gikandi (1991, 2001) highlights the politics of knowledge and language in colonial encounters. Mireku-Gyimah's (2013) work on satire further elucidates how ridicule functions as a mode of social criticism in African texts, reinforcing this study's focus on satire as resistance. Together, these theoretical perspectives enable a reading of irony, satire, and iconoclasm as interconnected strategies through which Achebe and Beti critique colonial domination, reveal its internal contradictions, and affirm the complexity of African cultural resilience.

A Brief Synopsis of Mongo Beti's '*The Poor Christ of Bomba'*

Mongo Beti's *The Poor Christ of Bomba* is a satirical novel set in colonial Cameroon during the 1930s. The story is narrated by Denis, a young Cameroonian boy who serves as an altar boy and assistant to Father Superior Drumont, a zealous Catholic missionary. Father Drumont is committed to spreading Christianity and converting the local population, whom he views as heathens in need of salvation. The novel unfolds during a missionary tour led by Father Drumont to the surrounding villages, where he discovers that many of his converts continue to practice their traditional beliefs alongside their newfound Christian faith. This revelation deeply frustrates him, as it undermines his efforts and exposes the superficial nature of the conversions. The narrative satirizes Father

Drumont's missionary zeal, highlighting the cultural misunderstandings and contradictions inherent in his work.
Beti uses irony to reveal the disconnection between the missionaries' intentions and the reality of the local people's lives. The novel critiques the missionaries' paternalistic attitudes and moral hypocrisy, which fail to recognize the complexity and richness of the indigenous cultures they seek to change. Throughout the novel, Beti explores themes of cultural imperialism, identity, and the struggle for autonomy and self-definition in the face of colonial oppression.

Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God* in a Nutshell

Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God* is set in the 1920s in Nigeria, focusing on the Igbo village of Umuaro and the impact of British colonial rule and Christian missionaries on its traditional way of life. The novel's protagonist, Ezeulu, is the chief priest of the god Ulu, caught between his spiritual duties and the pressures of colonial influence. As the British colonial administration attempts to exert control over the region, Ezeulu faces internal and external challenges. He is conflicted between his loyalty to traditional practices and the need to adapt to the changing political landscape. Ezeulu sends his son Oduche to a Christian school to learn the ways of the white man, hoping to protect his people by understanding the colonial forces.

However, this decision leads to unintended consequences, as Oduche becomes torn between his father's traditional beliefs and the new religion. Achebe employs irony to explore the complexities of power, authority, and resistance. The novel highlights the contradictions within both colonial and indigenous systems, showing how rigid adherence to tradition or blind acceptance of foreign influence can lead to cultural disintegration. Through Ezeulu's struggles, Achebe examines themes of leadership, cultural identity, and the tension between change and continuity in a rapidly evolving society.

In Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God,* iconoclasm plays a significant role in illustrating the clash between traditional Igbo culture and the encroaching influence of British colonialism and Christianity. The arrival of British colonialists and Christian missionaries introduces new religious beliefs and political structures. The traditional way of life perceives this foreign influence as a threat.

The missionaries, in particular, seek to convert the Igbo people to Christianity, often by denouncing their gods and religious practices as pagan and idolatrous. This iconoclasm, or the destruction and rejection of traditional religious icons and practices, creates deep divisions within the community. Achebe employs satire to critique the colonial administrators. Achebe portrays colonial characters, like Captain Winterbottom, as arrogant and oblivious to the complexities of Igbo society. Their attempts to impose order often result in chaos and misunderstanding. Captain Winterbottom's decision to appoint Ezeulu as a warrant chief, without understanding the cultural implications, is portrayed with biting satire, highlighting the absurdity and ignorance of colonial policies. It also critiques the colonial mindset and the internal conflicts within the Igbo community, reflecting the hybrid and ambivalent nature of cultural encounters.

Irony in Achebe's *Arrow of God*: Power, Authority, and Unintended Consequences

Achebe's Arrow of God deploys irony as a structural device to interrogate the instability of power under colonial modernity. Authority in the novel, whether indigenous or colonial, is depicted as a complex and unstable force shaped by dynamics of power, domination, and competing structures of governance; it remains contingent, fragmented, and ultimately undermined by the very systems through which it seeks to assert control. Achebe's ironic vision aligns closely with Fanon's critique of traditional authority under colonial pressure, Said's analysis of epistemic domination, and Bhabha's concept of ambivalence.

Ezeulu's authority derives from ritual mediation rather than coercion. Early in the novel, Achebe defines this position metaphorically: "*Ezeulu was the arrow in the bow of his god" (Achebe, 1989, p. 3).* The image underscores Ezeulu's instrumental role, yet the irony lies in his gradual assumption of autonomy over divine will. As Irele (2001) notes, Ezeulu *"mistakes symbolic centrality for political sovereignty"* (p. 111), a miscalculation that isolates him from his community.

Achebe intensifies this irony when Ezeulu refuses to eat the sacred yams, despite looming famine: *"The chief priest did not eat yams on the advice of men" (Achebe, 1989, p. 209).* What is framed as fidelity to tradition becomes ethical violence against the community. Fanon (1963) warns that when traditional authority *"refuses historical mediation, it turns against the people it claims to serve" (p. 148)*. Ezeulu's rigidity thus accelerates, rather than resists, colonial domination.

Perhaps the most devastating irony arises from Ezeulu's calculated engagement with colonial power. He sends his son to the mission school, declaring: *"I want one of my sons to be my eye there" (Achebe, 1989, pp. 45–46)*. Intended as strategic surveillance, this act produces internal betrayal. Oduche's imprisonment of the sacred python, "*the royal python… writhing in a box" (p. 54*), constitutes an act of indigenous iconoclasm. Nnoromele (2000) observes that this moment marks *"the internalization of colonial contempt for indigenous cosmology" (p. 152).*

Moreover, Achebe's Arrow of God exemplifies Edward Said's (1978) notion of epistemic violence, in which colonial discourse dismantles indigenous knowledge systems from within. Achebe reinforces this irony when he notes*: "The white man's religion had turned him against his own people" (Achebe, 1989, p. 58).*
Achebe also ironizes colonial authority through Captain Winterbottom. His belief that authority can be bureaucratically

transferred collapses when he attempts to appoint Ezeulu as a warrant chief. Achebe remarks with quiet satire: "*The white man thought authority was something one could give and take like a piece of yam" (Achebe, 1989, p. 140*). Gikandi (1991) argues that such moments reveal colonial power as *"performative rather than absolute" (p. 44).*

Thus, the irony of Arrow of God lies in its conclusion. Ezeulu's refusal to compromise results in mass conversion: *"The god had failed them, and they went elsewhere" (Achebe, 1989, p. 230)*. Resistance produces surrender. Fanon's insight is unmistakable: Colonialism triumphs not solely through force but through the collapse of indigenous authority under internal strain.

Irony in Beti's *The Poor Christ of Bomba*: Missionary Zeal and Cultural Misrecognition

In his novel "*The Poor Christ of Bomba"*, Mongo Beti uses irony, with an aggressive satirical edge, to expose the moral incoherence and epistemic arrogance of the Christian missionary enterprise under colonialism. Unlike Achebe's tragic irony, Beti's irony is corrosive and destabilizing, aimed squarely at dismantling the ideological foundations of missionary authority. Through the figure of Father Dumont, Beti dramatizes what Fanon (1963) describes as the colonizer's "missionary alibi", the claim to moral salvation that conceals cultural violence.

Father Drumont's conviction of himself as a spiritual savior is repeatedly challenged and destabilized through the use of narrative irony, which exposes the contradictions between his self-image and the reality of his actions. Early in the novel, Denis observes with unconscious candor: "Father Drumont believed himself loved and respected by all, yet fear followed him wherever he went" (Beti, 1971, p. 21). The irony lies uh the gap between Drumont's imagined authority and the community's lived experience of it. His power is sustained not by conviction but by surveillance and

coercion, confirming Said's (1978) argument that colonial authority depends on misrecognition rather than mutual understanding.

Beti intensifies this irony through Drumont's obsession with sexual morality. His campaign against premarital relationships produces not spiritual discipline but social fragmentation. Denis notes: *"The Father counted sins the way others counted coins" (Beti, 1971, p. 39)*. This metaphor satirizes Christianity as an accounting system of control, reducing human intimacy to a matter of moral transgression. As Fanon (1963) argues, colonial morality functions as a disciplinary apparatus that *"regulates bodies before it redeems souls" (p. 42).*

One of the novel's most sustained ironies lies in the superficial success of conversion. Drumont proudly records baptisms, yet Denis reveals their hollowness*: "They prayed on Sunday and sacrificed to the ancestors on Monday" (Beti, 1971, p. 61)*, just like what Homi Bhabha (1994) posits in his concept of mimicry, in which colonial subjects adopt the outward forms of imperial culture while subtly subverting its authority. Conversion becomes performance rather than belief, destabilizing missionary claims of spiritual triumph.

Beti further exposes missionary hypocrisy through explicit narrative judgment. Reflecting on Drumont's intolerance, Denis remarks: *"They came to teach love, but brought with them anger and punishment" (Beti, 1971, p. 84)*. The irony here is moral inversion: Christianity, a religion of compassion, manifests as cruelty within the colonial context. Irele (2001) notes that Beti's satire "*reveals Christianity not as a spiritual encounter but as a technology of domination" (p. 141).*

Hence, iconoclasm in *The Poor Christ of Bomba* is rendered as both physical and psychological violence. The destruction of indigenous sacred spaces marks a rupture in cultural memory:

"The sacred grove had been cleared, as if it had never been there" (Beti, 1971, p. 146). Here, Beti's words agree with what Edward Said (1993, *p. 66*) calls "*overwrite native histories".* The irony is that this act of supposed enlightenment produces a cultural void rather than spiritual fulfillment.

The most brutal embodiment of missionary iconoclasm occurs in the public humiliation of Sanga Boto. Beti describes the scene with graphic detail: *"He was dragged shamefully through the village in short cotton drawers… the older men watched with surly expressions" (Beti, 1971, pp. 73–74).* Here, Christian authority manifests as bodily violence, stripping the colonized subject of dignity, where domination operates through spectacle, humiliation, and fear long before it claims moral legitimacy, as Fanon (1963) puts it in his unmistakable colonial violence.

Beti concludes his ironic dismantling of missionary enterprise by revealing Drumont's ultimate failure. Despite years of effort, the mission collapses, leaving disillusionment in its wake. Denis observes with quiet finality: *"The Father left, and life returned to what it had been, only poorer" (Beti, 1971, p. 178).* The irony is devastating: colonial Christianity neither redeems nor transforms; it merely scars. Gikandi (2001) aptly summarizes Beti's project as one that "*forces Colonialism to confront its own moral emptiness" (p. 70*). Through relentless irony, *The Poor Christ of Bomba* exposes missionary zeal as a tragic farce, one that mistakes domination for salvation and misunderstanding for faith.

Satire as a Weapon against Colonial and Missionary Arrogance

Both Achebe and Beti present satire as a counter-discursive strategy that describes the moral incoherence and ideological arrogance of colonial and missionary authority. That is satire in both novels, functioning to unmask power by rendering it absurd, excessive, and internally contradictory.

In *Arrow of God*, Achebe's satire is largely institutional and understated, targeting the bureaucratic logic of British colonial administration. Captain Winterbottom's faith in indirect rule is satirized through his belief that governance can be reduced to administrative convenience: *"The white man had come to bring peace and order, not to understand native customs" (Achebe, 1989, p. 138*). Achebe portrays the irony of this position by demonstrating that colonial order generates greater instability, as the imposition of warrant chiefs disrupts existing communal authority.

The satirical edge sharpens when Winterbottom considers appointing Ezeulu as a warrant chief, believing authority transferable across cultural systems: *"He did not know that a chief priest was not a chief" (Achebe, 1987, p. 140).* This moment exemplifies what Said (1978) terms 'Orientalist reduction,' an epistemic flattening that converts complex indigenous institutions into administrable categories. Achebe's satire reveals colonial governance as a performance of power sustained by ignorance.
Achebe further satirizes colonial arrogance through bureaucratic language that trivializes indigenous life. Winterbottom's illness is described with more administrative urgency than the famine affecting Umuaro, revealing colonial priorities skewed toward self-preservation (Achebe, 1987, p. 152).

By contrast, Beti's satire in The Poor Christ of Bomba (Beti, 1971) is overt, confrontational, and corporeal. Father Drumont's actions repeatedly collapse the moral authority Christianity claims to embody. The infamous scene in which he drags Sanga Boto through the village is rendered in grotesque detail: *"Without a moment's hesitation, the Father seized this limb of Satan by the arm and dragged him clean out of the house… the lappa fell off, and Sanga Boto was dragged shamefully through the village" (Beti, 1971, pp. 73–74*). The satire here lies in the violent contradiction between Christian compassion and missionary cruelty. In Fanon's words, colonial violence often masquerades as

moral correction; Beti strips away this disguise by foregrounding bodily humiliation.

The narrative voice repeatedly ironizes Drumont's self-image as a savior. He is described as *"savior of souls who knew not the soul of the people he sought to save" (Beti, 1971, p. 89).* This statement directly enacts Said's (1978) critique of imperial authority as epistemologically hollow, claiming knowledge while practicing erasure. Beti further satirizes missionary obsession with sexual regulation, portraying it as voyeuristic control rather than moral reform: *"The Father's greatest fear was that the village slept while he watched" (Beti, 1971, p. 112).* The satire exposes what Bhabha (1994) identifies as colonial ambivalence; the missionary's authority depends on constant surveillance, revealing insecurity rather than dominance.

Consequently, satire in both novels dismantles colonial self-legitimation by dramatizing the collapse of moral authority from within. Achebe showcases institutional absurdity, whereas Beti represents ethical violence. Together, they reveal colonial power as theatrically confident but structurally incoherent.

Iconoclasm, Religious Conflict, and the Disintegration of Indigenous Order

Iconoclasm in both *Arrow of God* and *The Poor Christ of Bomba* functions as a central mechanism of colonial domination, targeting not only religious symbols but also the epistemological foundations of indigenous societies. Fanon's (1963) assertion that colonialism seeks *to "empty the native's brain of all form and content"* is vividly dramatized through the destruction, denigration, and displacement of African spiritual systems.

In *Arrow of God,* Achebe presents iconoclasm as gradual, strategic, and internally corrosive. The missionaries' denunciation of Igbo deities initiates a slow erosion of communal faith. Ezeulu

foresees this collapse in a haunting prophetic vision: "*Ezeulu saw the shrines abandoned, the gods forgotten, and the people trooping to a strange god" (Achebe, 1987, p. 230).* This vision encapsulates the epistemic violence that Said (1993) describes as cultural replacement rather than coexistence.

The imprisonment of the sacred python by Oduche marks a pivotal iconoclastic rupture: *"The python lay coiled in the box like a log, denied its freedom" (Achebe, 1987, p. 55).* This act is not merely a religious transgression but a symbolic incarceration of indigenous cosmology. Achebe underscores the irony that this violation originates within Ezeulu's household, revealing how colonial intrusion weaponizes internal division.

Achebe further links iconoclasm to material deprivation. When famine drives villagers to Christianity, conversion becomes an economic strategy rather than spiritual conviction: *"The people said that the new religion had offered them food when Ulu had none" (Achebe, 1987, p. 216).* In *The Poor Christ of Bomba*, iconoclasm is more aggressive and visually violent. Sacred spaces are physically replaced*: "The sacred grove was no more. In its place stood a wooden cross" (Beti, 1971, p. 131).* Beti's language emphasizes spatial conquest, that colonial authority seeks visibility through symbolic occupation.

Missionaries explicitly label indigenous gods as demonic*: "Your gods are lies. They are demons who keep you in darkness" (Beti, 1971, p. 97).* This rhetoric exemplifies what Said (1978) identifies as discursive domination, where language becomes an instrument of annihilation. Beti also foregrounds the psychological trauma of iconoclasm. Converts experience not enlightenment but dislocation: *"They had lost their ancestors and gained nothing but fear" (Beti, 1971, p. 158).* Conversion emerges as cultural amputation, reinforcing Fanon's (1952) claim that colonialism fractures identity at the psychic level.

Across both novels, iconoclasm produces neither spiritual renewal nor social harmony. Instead, it generates cultural amnesia, communal fragmentation, and historical rupture. Achebe presents iconoclasm as tragically negotiated; Beti presents it as violently imposed. Together, they reveal iconoclasm as a central technology of colonial power, one that destroys not only gods, but culture and humanity at large.

Postcolonial Ambivalence and the Limits of Resistance

In *Arrow of God* and *The Poor Christ of Bomba*, Achebe and Beti foreground the ambivalence inherent in colonial encounters, portraying authority and resistance as fractured, conflicted, and historically constrained. Colonial power, despite its apparent dominance and authority, is portrayed as an unstable and contradictory force, generating consequences that not only further imperial ambitions but also expose and weaken the very foundations of colonial control.

In *Arrow of God*, Ezeulu, the chief priest of Ulu, epitomizes the tension between indigenous authority and colonial intrusion. Early in the novel, he reflects: *"Whenever Ezeulu considered the immensity of his power over the year and the crops and, therefore, over the people, he wondered if it was real.... 'He was merely a watchman. His power was no more than the power of a child over a goat that was said to be his*" (Achebe, 1964/1986, p. 3).

Here, Achebe ironizes Ezeulu's self-perception, revealing that indigenous authority, while culturally legitimate, is destabilized by both internal and external pressures. Moreover, the tragic consequences of Ezeulu's strategic engagement with colonial power further exemplify ambivalence: '*It was I who sent you to join those people because of my friendship with the white man, Wintabota.... I did not send you so that you might leave your duty in my household' (Achebe, 1987, p. 13).*

This irony, whereby Ezeulu's effort to preserve indigenous tradition through sending his son to the mission school ultimately undermines the very cultural values he seeks to protect, reflects Bhabha's (1994) notion of mimicry. The adoption of colonial practices by the colonized creates unintended consequences, gradually contributing to cultural displacement and the erosion of traditional authority.

Additional moments underscore communal fragmentation: *"I have traveled in Olu, and I have traveled in Igbo, and I can tell you there is no escape from the white man.… As daylight chases away darkness, so will the white man drive away all our customs" (Achebe, 1987*). He further continues: "*My father used to say that it is the fear of causing offense that makes men swallow poison" (Achebe, 1987).*

These quotations collectively depict the disorientation of traditional structures under colonial pressure and the paradoxical outcomes of resistance, reflecting both an emphasis on structural disruption and a critique of epistemic authority.
In the Poor Christ of Bomba, Beti similarly highlights ambivalence through the contradictory authority of Father Drumont. He simultaneously seeks to save souls and enforce compliance: *"Ah, if only they will build that road, if they will beat and persecute these people, then perhaps they will all return to God" (Beti, 1971, p. 38).*

The villagers' ironic critique also captures the misrecognition at the heart of colonial discourse*: "They say that you must be hiding things from them.… Nevertheless, you preach that, after baptism, the blacks should cease to visit their own relatives.… That is what they say, Father" (Beti, 1971, p. 20).* This exposes the hypocrisy of missionary authority; which colonial epistemologies claim universality while erasing local knowledge. Beti further illustrates the psychological consequences of this ambivalence: *"But Jesus Christ is just like the Father!" (Beti, 1971*). He adds: "*If I*

understand you, Father, evangelizing the blacks is like taking an old water jug and trying to turn it into an amphora?" (Beti, 1971). He also again confirms*: "But Father, they say that a priest is no better than a Greek trader or any other colonialist.... You are not sincere with them" (Beti, 1971, p. 20).*

These passages reveal the hybrid responses of the colonized: outward compliance, subtle mimicry, and critical reinterpretation of imposed authority. The villagers' ambivalence embodies both resistance and adaptation, demonstrating the interplay of coercion, persuasion, and agency central to Bhabha's framework.

In Achebe, Ezeulu's decisions simultaneously preserve and undermine tradition; in Beti, the villagers negotiate compliance and critique, revealing the fractured nature of authority. Irony, satire, and iconoclasm serve not only as literary devices but also as analytical tools that expose the contradictions, contingencies, and hybridity of colonial encounters.

Conclusion

Through the intertwined deployment of irony, satire, and iconoclasm, Achebe's *Arrow of God* and Beti's *The Poor Christ of Bomba* offer incisive critiques of colonial and missionary enterprises, revealing the profound instability and ambivalence inherent in colonial encounters. Both novels demonstrate that authority is limited and multidirectional. Achebe and Beti show that the imposition of colonial power dismantles traditional structures while producing fractured forms of resistance, complicity, and mimicry.

In conclusion, *Arrow of God* and *The Poor Christ of Bomba* present complex representations of authority, cultural negotiation, and the disruptive consequences of colonial encounter. Through the struggles of Ezeulu and Father Drumont, both novels reveal that power is neither absolute nor stable; rather, it is shaped by competing systems of belief, social expectations, and political

interests. Ezeulu's experience demonstrates how indigenous authority, while deeply rooted in tradition and spirituality, can become vulnerable when confronted with internal conflicts and external colonial pressures. Similarly, Father Drumont's missionary authority is exposed as contradictory, as his efforts to impose moral and cultural transformation reveal the limitations and contradictions of colonial ideology.

The two novels further illustrate that colonial domination operates not only through direct political control but also through cultural and psychological mechanisms that reshape identities and social structures. However, colonial power itself remains unstable, as its attempts to transform indigenous societies often generate resistance, adaptation, and unintended consequences. Through the concepts of ambivalence, mimicry, and hybridity, the narratives demonstrate that colonial encounters produce complex spaces in which neither the colonizer nor the colonized maintains complete control over meaning, identity, or authority.

Achebe and Beti therefore use irony, satire, and representations of cultural disruption to challenge simplified understandings of colonial power and resistance. Their works reveal the tensions between preservation and transformation, tradition and modernity, authority and vulnerability. Ultimately, these novels portray African societies not as passive victims of colonial history but as active participants engaged in continuous negotiation, adaptation, and reconstruction of cultural identity in the aftermath of colonial disruption.

References

Achebe, C. (1987). *Arrow of God*. Heinemann African Writers Series. (Original work published 1964)

Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G., & Tiffin, H. (2002). *The empire writes back: Theory and practice in postcolonial literatures* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

Beti, M. (1971). *The Poor Christ of Bomba* (G. Moore, Trans.). Heinemann. (Original work published 1956)

Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The location of culture*. Routledge.

Fanon, F. (1952). *Black skin, white masks*. Grove Press.

Fanon, F. (1963). *The wretched of the earth* (C. Farrington, Trans.). Grove Press. (Original work published 1961)

Gikandi, S. (1991). *Reading Chinua Achebe: Language and ideology in fiction*. Heinemann.

Gikandi, S. (2001). *Africa and the politics of knowledge: Equivocal engagements*. University of Minnesota Press.

Irele, A. (2001). *The African imagination: Literature in Africa and the Black diaspora*. Oxford University Press.

Mireku-Gyimah, P. B. (2013). Satire as social criticism in African literature. *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences, 3*(9), 269–275.

Nnoromele, P. (2000). The plights of a hero in Achebe's *Arrow of God*. *Research in African Literatures, 31*(3), 146–158. https://doi.org/10.1353/ral.2000.0064

Said, E. W. (1978). *Orientalism*. Pantheon Books.

Said, E. W. (1993). *Culture and imperialism*. Knopf.