

Losing Faith in Uzodinma Iweala's Novel

Beast of No Nation (2005)

Thesis

*Submitted as a partial fulfillment of the requirement to obtain
the strata one (S1) degree*



By :

**Ana Khairunnisak
96561/2009**

Advisors:

**Dr. Kurnia Ningsih, M.A.
Dra. An Fauzia Rozani Syafei, M.A.**

**ENGLISH DEPARTMENT
FACULTY OF LANGUAGES AND ART
STATE UNIVERSITY OF PADANG
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HALAMAN PERSETUJUAN SKRIPSI

LOSING FAITH IN UZODINMA IWEALA'S NOVEL *BEAST OF NO NATION* (2005)

Nama : Ana Khairunnisak
NIM / TM : 96561 / 2009
Jurusan : Bahasa dan Sastra Inggris
Program Studi : Bahasa dan Sastra Inggris
Fakultas : Bahasa dan Seni

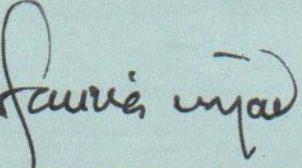
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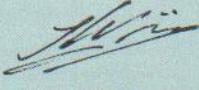
Pembimbing I


Dr. Kurnia Ningsih, M.A.
NIP. 19540626 198203 2 001

Pembimbing II


Dra. An Fauziah Rozani Syafei, M.A.
NIP. 19660424 199002 001

Diketahui oleh,
Ketua Jurusan Bahasa dan Sastra Inggris


Dr. Kurnia Ningsih, M.A.
NIP. 19540626 198203 2 001

HALAMAN PENGESAHAN LULUS UJIAN SKRIPSI

Dinyatakan lulus setelah dipertahankan di depan Tim Pengaji Skripsi
Jurusan Bahasa dan Sastra Inggris Fakultas Bahasa dan Seni
Universitas Negeri Padang

LOSING FAITH IN UZODINMA IWEALA'S NOVEL *BEAST OF NO NATION* (2005)

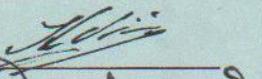
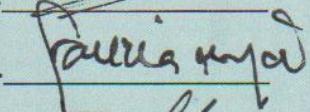
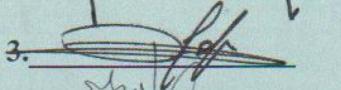
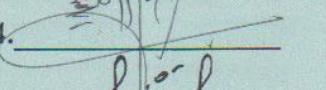
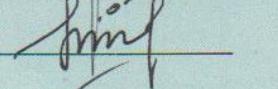
Nama	:	Ana Khairunnisak
NIM / TM	:	96561 / 2009
Jurusan	:	Bahasa dan Sastra Inggris
Program Studi	:	Bahasa dan Sastra Inggris
Fakultas	:	Bahasa dan Seni

Padang, Februari 2015

Tim Pengaji

	Nama
1. Ketua	: Dr. Kurnia Ningsih, M.A
2. Sekretaris	: Dra. An Fauzia Rozani Syafei, M.A
3. Anggota	: Havid Ardi, S.Pd, M.Hum
4. Anggota	: Delvi Wahyuni, S.S, M.A
5. Anggota	: Leni Marlina, S.S, M.A

Tanda Tangan

1. 
2. 
3. 
4. 
5. 



UNIVERSITAS NEGERI PADANG
FAKULTAS BAHASA DAN SENI
JURUSAN BAHASA DAN SASTRA INGGRIS
Jl. Belibis, Air Tawar Barat. Kampus Selatan FBS UNP. Padang. Telp/Fax: (0751) 447347

SURAT PERNYATAAN TIDAK PLAGIAT

Saya yang bertanda tangan di bawah ini:

Nama : Ana Khairunnisak
NIM/TM : 96561/2009
Program Studi : Bahasa dan Sastra Inggris
Jurusan : Bahasa dan Sastra Inggris
Fakultas : FBS UNP

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Diketahui oleh,

Ketua Jurusan Bahasa dan Sastra Inggris


Dr. Kurnia Ningsih, M.A.
NIP. 19540626 198203 2 001

Saya yang menyatakan,



Ana Khairunnisak

ABSTRAK

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Pembimbing: 1. Dr. Kurnia Ningsih, M. A.
2. Dra. An Fauzia Rozani Syafei, M.A.

Skripsi ini merupakan analisa Novel *Beast of No Nation* (2005) karya Uzodinma Iweala. Masalah yang di angkat adalah sejauh novel *Beast of No Nation* menggambarkan hilangnya keimanan terhadap Tuhan dan sejauh mana fictional devices seperti tokoh utama, plot dan setting mendukung dalam mengungkapkan makna. Tujuan penganalisaan ini adalah untuk mendapatkan jawaban sejauh mana novel ini merefleksikan hilangnya keimanan terhadan Tuhan dan kontribusi fictional devices dalam mengungkap makna. Penelitian ini dilakukan dengan menggunakan pendekatan teks and konteks. Analisa ini juga dihubungkan konsep teologi dari John K Roth dan konsep psikologi dari Sigmund Freud. Hasil analisa menunjukkan bahwa protagonis melakukan tindakan-tindakan yang bertujuan untuk menentang keberadaan Tuhan serta sikap yang sangat sadis dan brutal sehingga membuktikan bahwa tidak ada lagi Tuhan dalam dirinya.

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I hope that this thesis can be useful for the readers. I am waiting for the critics and suggestions for a better thesis in the future. Thank you.

Padang, March 2015

The writer

Ana Khairunnisak

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Generally, belief in religion has already been embeded to human life since they are children. They are taught to believe in God that He is all merciful and powerful. He is helping and protecting them from harm. They are also taught to keep the harmony of life because God loves it. They will get punishment by not following God's rules. These are supposed to be a faith and principle of a life time. Unfortunately, the faith is often challenged when tragic event is occurred. The event makes the principle seems confusing. It also makes the perspective about God be unstable. For example, they have a faith that God is powerful and merciful, but lacks ability to offer a help or protection when they are facing a tragic life. That is why the question regarding injustice, unfairness, and meaning such as "Where is God ?" or "Does God exist ?" emerge to rise while facing unwanted circumstances. The faith is potential to lose if they fail to preserve it. Even worse, they can turn back against God.

There is a tendency of altering a faith after facing unwanted event. Daniel (2010:18) states that people tend to change their spiritual perspective due to tragic events like trauma, grief and loss. It can ruin the belief about the nature of God, good and evil, security, and one's place in the universe. For example, if faith is defined by the belief that God is giving human a protection from harm, then the faith will certainly be challenged when harm occurs. It creates a great disappointment of the spirituality and feeling of being abandoned and betrayed by

God. The alteration of beliefs has a potential to produce tremendous personal change, both spiritually and psychologically. This is the reason which makes people possible to lose their faith and turn into different personality.

Losing faith can be seen through psychologically and spiritually. Psychologically, losing faith can make people change the way they think, act, and behave. There is no ultimate rule to control them. They can act as the way they like. For example, they will feel free to steal, rape, or kill their neighbor without fear of sin and God's punishment. Spiritually, people who lose a faith can be very sensitive dealing with anything related to God. They turn themselves against Him. For instance, they argue about the existence of God. They can also make a mocking about Him, and curse others who still believe in Him.

A research has been done by Brende and McDonal (1989) entitled *Post-Traumatic Spiritual Alienation and Recovery in Vietnam Combat Veteran*. According to their survey toward thirty Vietnam Veterans at Bay Pines V.A Medical Center, these veterans could not preserve their faith after experiencing loss, death, and grief. They had indeed changed their spiritual perspective about the existence of God. These experiences increased the sense of doubt about the nature of God which they had believed and had in mind. They sensed a betrayal and found that a powerful God had failed to offer a help. As the result, they turned themselves against Him. Moreover, Brende and McDonal put a research which was done by Mahedy (1986). It is stated that Vietnam Veterans sowed seeds of doubt about the foundation of faith. Not only the American religious experience

but also the authentic biblical faith was called into serious question as “Where indeed was God in Vietnam ?”.

The phenomenon of losing faith also found in *Beasts Of No Nation* (2005) Novel by Uzodinma Iweala. The novel is interested to be analyzed since it shows tragic life events of young Christian boy who become a child soldier. The contradictory life he has before and after the war has put him the crisis of faith and lead him to lose his faith in God. Furthermore, he also loses his sense of humanity and thinks that God lets him suffer and leaves him behind. These have provoked him to abandon his faith. He turns against God and becomes a sadist.

1.1.1 Losing Faith

There are two terms in this study. They are losing and faith. In Cambridge Dictionary of American English (2000), lose means a failure to maintain something wanted or valued or no longer have control over a quality. It refers to the lack of ability to preserve something which has already existed. In this analysis, the word shows that the protagonist had failed to preserve his faith due to tragic life he faced.

The second term is faith. Faith is a strong religious belief or trust about the existence of God and the systems and rule based on spiritual apprehension rather than proof. Karen Amstrong (2005) in her journal in the world wisdom online library states that :

"originally, the meaning of the word "faith" was akin to trust. Faith was not an intellectual position but a virtue: it was the careful cultivation, by means of the rituals and myths of religion, of the conviction that,

despite all the dispiriting evidence to the contrary, life had some ultimate meaning and value." (p.73)

From the quotation above, faith is a trust within a person to God with the belief in all of His natures without the need of a proof or evidence. Since faith is virtue, it cannot be challenged into an intellectual perspective. It gives meaning and value to human life. It also must be well maintained through religious system.

From those two definitions, losing faith means the lack of ability in preventing a strong trust in God and the belief to all His natures especially when facing such tragic circumstances. People who lose their faith start to question the existence of God by seeking an evidence and proof. If people fail to find that God is omnipotent and merciful, they tend to surrender their faith. People who lose their faith are possible to turn into different personality.

In this analysis, losing faith can be analyzed in two terms. They are turning oneself against God and being sadistic. Furthermore, turning oneself against God is a behavior to become a spiritual hardened. Whereas being sadistic refers to an action to become very brutal and get a satisfaction in cruelty.

1.1.2 Uzodinma Iweala

Uzodinma Iwela is a Nigerian. He was born in United State in November 5, 1982. He was raised among educated family. He is the son of Dr. Ikemba Iweala and his mother is Dr Ngozi Okonjo Iweala who is the Former Finance Minister and Foreign Minister of Nigeria. He has a younger brother named Uchechi Iweala who is doing MD/MBA in Harvard Medical School. In addition,

his aunt, Chi Ogunyemi, was a Professor in Sarah Lawrence University where she taught African/American Literature study. He was graduated from Harvard University and Medical Study from Colombia University College of Physicians and Surgeons.

In the age of 23, Iweala has gotten an outstanding carrier as a writer. He was dedicated as 20 Best Young American Novelists in 2007 by Granta Magazine. He has produced two novels. They are *Beast of No Nation* (2005) and *Our Kind of People* (2012). *Beasts of No Nation* (2005) is his debut novel which has driven him into a huge success. This novel has already been translated in eleven different languages and showered by many prizes. The prizes are The winner of the Young Lions Fiction Award by New York Public Library, First-Place Winner of the 2005 Discover Award, James Tait Black Memorial prize for Fiction, Sue Kaufman Prize for First Fiction from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, Barnes & Noble Discover Great New Writers Award for Fiction, The Los Angeles Times Art Seidenbaum Award for First Fiction. In addition, due to its greatness, the novel is being filmed and directed by Cary Fukunaga.

Some great writers and an International Media have uttered their opinion about the greatness Iweala's debut novel and acknowledge his talent. Chris Abani, an African Author who wrote *The Secret History Of LasVegas*, states that Iweala is “*a gifted and brave writer*”. Amitav Ghose, the author of *The Glass Palace*, also makes a statement for Iweala's work. He says “*Beasts of No Nation is a work of visceral urgency...it heralds the arrival of a major talent.*”. In addition, the statement in New York Time Magazine says “*Uzodinma Iweala is receiving not*

just hype but praise from reviewers for the frighteningly convincing voice of a preteen soldier". These statements prove that Iweala has a talent to be a great African author.

Iweala seems very interested in the issues and conflicts in Africa. It can be seen through the ideas of his two novels. Smith (2012) states that Iweala feels "very aware of and protective" to his African-ness. The basic idea of his first novel itself, *Beast of No Nation*, is a result of his own observation by reading articles, studying the report, and interviewing people who had been through the conflict of Sierra Leone and Nigerian civil war in 1960s. His second novel, *Our Kind Of People*, talks about HIV which is emerging as a big issue in Africa. From his work, Iweala wants to be the ambassador of his own country telling the world that Africa still has scar and issues to be solved.

1.1.3 Beasts of No Nation

Uzodinma Iweala's novel *Beasts of No Nation* (2005) reflects losing faith. Losing faith is an inability of maintaining a belief about the existence of God. People who lose their faith do not put any concern and a strong trust in God. They do not pay more attention to His existence and feel that they are betrayed. The protagonist in this novel is nine years old boy named Agu. He is a representation of people who lose a faith. He was forcefully recruited to be a child soldier. During the war, he faced some tragic circumstances. For example, he lived in poverty; lack of food, cloth, and had no place to stay. He also faced horrible situation; seeing the death right before his eyes. Last, he involved in violence; stealing, raping, torturing, even killing. Living in such circumstances

give a deep impact for his faith and personality. These are the reason which lead him to lose his faith. Then he turns into different personality and become very brutal like a beast. The lost of his faith can be seen through the way he is turning himself against God and being sadistic.

Turning against God is an act to become spiritual hardened. As in this novel, the protagonist argues about God's existence. He convinces himself that God does not exist. He also derides other believers. He makes a mocking about Him.

Being sadistic means being cruel or violence and gaining an enjoyment by doing so. The protagonist finds pleasure in doing atrocities. He is lack of respect and empathy. He attacks innocent people. He uses drug in order to get more satisfaction in killing

1.2 Problem of study

The issues which is exposed in *Beasts of No Nation* (2005) are deversed. One of them is losing faith. In order to reveal the issue, two research questions are needed. They are:

1. How far does Uzodinma Iwealas's novel *Beasts of No Nation* reflects the issue of losing faith?
2. To what extend do the fictional divices of novel such as the main character, plot (conflict), and setting give the contribution in revealing the issue of losing faith?

1.2 Purpose of study

This study is supposed to find out how far the novel *Beasts of No Nation* written by Uzodinma Iwela (2005) portrayed the topic about losing faith which is experienced by the protagonist. The study also investigates to what extend that the main character, plot (conflict), and setting contributed in disclosing the issue of losing faith.

1.3 Previous Study

The analysis about *Beast Of No Nation* (2005) that focused on losing faith has not been found yet. However, there are some studies that give contributions and inspirations in analyzing this novel.

The first study is written by Emily Nepon (1995) entitled “*Dynamic of Faith in the Work of Elie Wiesel*”. In this study, she analyzed six of Wiesel’s works. They were five novels and a cantata. Those entitled *Night*, *The Gate of The Forest*, *The Town Behind The Wall*, *Massanger of God*, *The Trial of God*, and *Ani Maamin (cantata)*. This text analyzed the characters by applying author based and theological approach. She found that there were similarities between the characters of Wiesel’s works and his personal life in understanding God. The first result shows that the protagonist in *Night* struggled for his faith, faced a doubt in it, and found that God was silent. Second, in *The Gates in the Forest*, the protagonist faced anger and disappointment toward God. Third, in *The Town Behind the Wall*, protagonist praised and condemned for God at the same time. Then, the protagonist in the *Messenger of God* wrestled with everything that

concerns to God. In *The Trial of God*, the protagonist presented the prosecution and God's defense. Last, in *Ani Maamin*, the protagonist dealt with paradoxical God in which "God is everything and nothing, active and inactive, omnipotent, omnipresent, and silent". In addition, she linked the story of Jacob in Torah with Wiesel's personal life as witness and survivor of Holocaust. She found that they survived terrifying experience, had crisis of faith, wrestled with God, and were changed. Both Wiesel and characters in his work have faced a dynamic of faith. It was a condition where his faith had tested. He did not lose his faith. However the events had strengthened it.

The second study is written by Temela Ice (2006) entitled "*Does Paneloux Lose faith?: Rethinking The Relationship Between Belief and Action in Camus' The Plague*". In this analysis, she analyzed the novel through fictional devices, character, by using theological approach which was related to the concept of "belief and action" by William James. She states that if one believes in God and His will, he has to act in the way he believes such as accepting God's will. The result shows that the protagonist did not lose his faith during his suffering time against the plague which attacked him and the villagers even though he died because of the disease. She found that protagonist was the presentation of an individual who believed and accepted the consequences of his belief in God. He showed some inconsistencies, sense of doubts which has put his faith into a crisis but he chose to keep it. He showed a commitment between his belief and action. In contrast, the villagers struggled for holding their faith while facing the disease and many of them had lost it.

The two analysis above have given much contributions and inspirations in analyzing the character. These studies also enriched the knowledge about the topic. However, this study has different focus from the previous analysis. In fact, it has similarities in concept about the crisis of holding a faith in tragic circumstances. This study focuses on how far does the main character, plot (conflict), and setting in Uzodinma Iweala's novel *Beast of No Nation* (2005) reflects losing faith.

1.4 Theoretical Framework

There are two concepts that are used to reveal losing faith. They are theology and psychology. In term of theology, losing faith is related to suffering. Faith is a strong trust in God. People who have faith in God should trust Him and His nature without questioning. However, most of people who lose their faith are those who cannot stand to see suffering or personally experience the suffering itself. Kessler (1999:210-211) states that suffering forces people to rise a question about God's nature and the reason why He permits it. Theologically, suffering is known as a problem of evil. The problem of evil often challenges the faith. According to Wainwright (1999:70-74), this problem makes God seems senseless. People can abandon their faith and even turn against God because of a problem of evil. This kind of case, according John K Roth, is covered by a concept called Theodicy of Protest. This concept is used to find out the lost of character's faith.

This novel is analyzed by using Roth's Theodicy of Protest. Roth in Davis (2001:4) stated that Theodicy of Protest is a concept that is used to resist the justification of God in a matter of permitting the problem of evil in the world. A question such as "why the omnipotent God permits evil" is the key word in this concept. According to Roth, God becomes senseless by permitting evil exist. In Davis (2001) he states :

"Theodicy of Protest is with no desire to legitimate the waste...we must do better against force that are loose in the world because God permits them...God lack of power and also be ineffectual... no matter what happened, God is going to be much less than perfectly justified." (p.11,12)

The quotation above shows how Roth perceives God. For him, the problem of evil is intolerable. It cannot be accepted since God has power to stop it. In fact, evil does exist. It proves that God is failed to do His job as an omnipotent one and to protect the human being. He is not as the way He has already been justified in the holy book or people have believed. Wainwright (1999:73) adds that in the matter of the existence of evil, it constitutes overwhelming evidence for the nonexistence of God. According to Roth, instead of waiting for God's help and mercy, people can do better with or without God to fix the mess. In short, they do not need God anymore.

Moltmann also has the similar opinion with Roth in perceiving God. Moltmann in Kane (2005) states :

"the suffering of a single innocent child is an irrefutable rebuttal of the notion of the almighty and kindly God in heaven. For a God who lets the innocent suffer and who permits senseless death is not worthy to be called God at all" (p.42)

He clearly stated that God is dysfunctional for his “almighty and kindly heaven”. People pray for His mercy and kindness but He is silent and seems to be helpless. The fact that the one who permits the death of the “innocent” is not even worthy to be called God. It is unacceptable since everything happens in the world is His responsibilities. The problem of evil is unacceptable and very difficult to be accepted since God exists. This is the reason why many people have abandoned and lost their faith while facing it.

In Davis (2001), Roth continues that the problems of evil do affect human life's spirit. It invites the feeling of anger, sadness, and also despair. Roth considers these feelings as a “give up hope”. People give up their hope in God because they think that God is silent and does not answer their prays. It seems that God has let them suffer. This creates a feeling of great disappointment. So that they can give up their faith and turn against God.

Roth's opinion is also supported by Pennenberg. In Kane (2005:41) Pannenberg stated that more people have abandoned and lose their faith because of the problem of evil than for any other reason. Problem of evil is certainly the greatest test of faith. People who ask the question are usually feeling resentment toward and rebellion against God. Not only the lack of evidence for His existence but also expressing anger for the lack of His own nature. In this analysis, the suffering has attacked protagonist's faith and lost it. Consequently, the protagonist becomes a spiritual hardened and turns against God. He argues about God's existence. He convinces himself that God does not exist. He also derides other believers. He makes a mocking about Him.

Psychologically, the loss of faith is related to the loss of superego agent in a personality. Superego is one of Freud's psychic energy. Freud in Guerin (2005:158) states that superego is a "moral censoring agency" which contains values, laws, and social ethics. Its functions are to repress or inhibit and block off the id toward the impulses of the pleasure which are regarded as unacceptable by the society. Superego develops through parental influence and society.

Since the superego is a moral consideration, religious value is one of the systems that build the moral value. It is supported by Byrnes (1984:74) by saying that "the official morally preach by religion". In every religion, people are taught about right and wrong, good and bad, punishment and reward, in order to control human actions. According to Wainwright (1999:71), religious people believe that the underlying principle of reality is private. That is the reason they are committed to claim that God is the subject of moral standard. It means, if one's moral conventions are built based on religious values, the loss of faith can be caused of losing moral consideration. In another word, the ego as the 'rational governing agent' cannot control the drive of the id. It will be difficult to prevent a personality from morally bad and proper. Consequently, the id will dominate the personality and make it a dangerous evil.

Id is the first element which is possessed by every human being. Freud in Guerin (2005:156-157) says that it is a "primary source of all psychic energy" whose function is to fulfill the primordial life principle that focused only in seeking a pleasure. According to Freud, id knows no values, lawless, a social, a moral. Id's dangerous potentialities have a possibility to create an evil personality.

If the personality consisted only instinctual craving and longing, it makes one to think, act, and behave as the way he likes without any consideration. If id is left without control, it will lead into destruction. For these reasons, the id is defined as Devil by theologians. These things are represented by the protagonist. He is dominated by the id and makes him a sadist. He finds pleasure in doing atrocities. He lacks of respect and empathy. He attacks innocent people. He uses drugs in order to get more satisfaction in killing.

This analysis is also done through text and context based interpretation in order to bring out the case of losing faith. It means that the analysis not only will focus on the text itself, but it also involves the phenomenons which exist in the real world. Klarer (1998:91) states that text is not regard as self-contained and independent works of art. However, it tries to place them within a larger context. It can be history, social, and political background, etc. The most influential movement is literary history which divides literary phenomenon into its period, describes the text, and examines their mutual influence.

In the process of analyzing the novel, the contribution of its fictional devices such as character, plot, and setting are very considerable since they are related to each other to bring up the story and determine the meaning. Character plays the crucial part in the story. As Bennet and Royle (2004:60) says that characters are “the life of the literature” which means the core of the story. It designs any entity, individual or collective, normally human or human like. Character also gives the details about the description on the behaviors and appearances. The character in this novel is a young smart and faithful boy. He

liked to read a bible since very little. He loved to go to school. He was also a champion in his class. He liked to go to the church every Sunday. Furthermore, his father was a school teacher and his mother was a faithful Christian lady who patiently taught and read him stories in the bible everyday. However, after war coming, he recruited forcefully to be child soldier and involved in cruelty of war. He lived in terrifying experiences. These had made him questioning God for His silence and by permitting evil happened. He could not prevent his faith while suffering. He lost his faith and turned against God.

The second device that is used in this analysis is plot which concerns in the matter of conflict. Guerin (2005:8) states that plot is a conflict. There are two kinds of conflict. They are internal and external conflict. Internal conflict is a conflict which is faced by the character with himself. In the other hand, external conflict is a conflict that is faced by the character to another character or his environment. In the focus of losing faith, protagonist deals with the internal conflict. It occurs between him and his faith in God. The external conflict occurs between the protagonist and war environment which provoke him to have an internal conflict.

The last important element in this analysis is setting. Setting is not only about time and place taken in the story. But it also strongly related to situation, condition, and atmosphere which influence the thought of the character. Klarer (1999) says :

“Setting denotes the location, Historical Period, and social surrounding in which the action of the text develops. Setting is one of the crucial elements of the genre as such. Setting contributes to create the

impression of the different perspectives or thought of the characters" (p.24)

From the explanation above, setting plays crucial influence on the character, his thought and perspective of his life and identity. It means setting is very important in defining text in order to find implicit meaning. In this novel, the protagonist was surrounded by grief, misery, and terrifying environment. His life is completely changed after war was coming. He had no more lovely atmosphere such as living in family, school, and neighborhood except the situation which transforms his goodness into a bestiality.

1.5 Methodology

The analysis of this novel is done through text-based and context-based interpretation. The fictional devices such as character, plot, and setting are needed during the process of analyzing. These devices are correlated each other. Character is used to reveal losing faith by analyzing character's belief, attitude, and behavior or action. Plot is used to acknowledge the conflicts that character faced. Furthermore, setting is also a crucial device as it is situation and condition which exist in the novel in order to reveal the character's way in seeing and interpreting his world. In addition, this analysis uses the concept of theology by John K Roth and psychology by Sigmund Freud.

CHAPTER III

CONCLUSION

Beast of No Nation novel (2005), written by Uzodinma Iweala reveals losing faith. It is exposed by focusing on two approaches. First is theological approach which is focused on Roth's Theodicy of Protest. It is about how the problems of evil attack the basic foundation of faith. Second is psychological approach by Freud which concern on the three elements of psyche. In this case, losing faith means the lost of ego and superego's function and make the personality only work in the level of id. Furthermore, the element of fiction such as setting, mostly, refers to tragic circumstances which are experienced by the protagonist. These experiences have made him deals with the conflict within himself about God. In this analysis, losing faith is revealed in two ways: turning against God and being sadistic. Turning against God is revealed in the way the protagonist rejects the nature of God and shows the act of spiritual hardened where as being sadistic is represented by the brutal action and sadistic behavior of the protagonist in this novel.

Losing faith is revealed in the way the protagonist manifests his anger and disappointment to God's silence. He argues about God existence, rejects His nature, and shows the tendency of spiritual hardened. The tragic events that he experienced regularly have made him to abandon his faith and lead him into a new spiritual perspective. He does not believe that God is helpful and irresponsible for His duty. Furthermore, he erases any knowledge he possesses about God. He also

thinks that those who still believe in God are stupid. Last, he makes mocking about God by taking pray as a joke.

Furthermore, losing faith is also revealed in the way the protagonist is being sadistic. All his sadistic actions prove that there is no more God within himself. He is showered by the act of murderer. His life is full of anger and hatred. The spirit of revenge becomes the fuel for his atrocities. Psychologically, it makes his ego and superego agents become dysfunctional since the energy in his id's zone is very strong. As the result, he becomes lawless, asocial, and amoral. He does not afraid of God or sin by doing the violence. He lost the sense of humanity. In short, he has indeed turns into a nasty beast.

Unfortunately, the matter of losing faith is commonly happened in the conflict areas. These are places where human are manipulated and treated more or less like an animal. For example, over thousands of innocent boys and girls have forcefully committed by the Government or an organization to be a child soldier. They face abundant terrifying experiences such as being raped, killed, or died in hunger during child soldering. Furthermore, they deal with these experiences in early of their ages. It would have created destructive generations in the future. They would have lived in the perspective with the absence of God during their life. These miserable facts indeed overthrow the beauty of God and the faith in Him. These phenomenons possibly destroys the basic foundation of the faith about the existence of God for those who involve directly or indirectly in such situations. Many people has abandoned their faith in God dealing with the problems of evil. In this matter, the fundamental knowledge

and a deep understanding about the belief are very much needed. Otherwise, a believer can turn back against God. Human without God inside have a possibility to act and behave as the way they like without considering any other consequences. They have a chance to become a beast or, even worse, a Devil.

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