

MULTICULTURALISM AS A TOOL FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: A STUDY OF OLA ROTIMI'S *IF...a tragedy of the ruled*.

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Abstract

Nigeria is a conglomeration of multi cultural and multi ethnic groups, made up of people from different cultural and ethnic nationalities. The need to understand and harness the potentials inherent in the different ethnic nationalities for the progress of the nation is the pivot of this study. The study is hinged on the Melting Pot Theory advocated by J. Hector St. John de Crevecoeur, an immigrant from France who described the demographic homogeneity of the United States as comprising "individuals of all nations....melted into a new race of men, whose labours and posterity will one day cause great changes in the world". According to him, the different ethnic groups can melt together in a pot to produce a desirable result. It is supported by the Salad Bowl Theory propounded by Historian Carl Degler, which sought a better image of cultural change than the older melting pot. It recognizes that there is cultural diversities and that if not properly managed may result in disunity. The study employs the content analysis approach of the qualitative research methodology to critically analyze *If... a tragedy of the ruled* by Ola Rotimi as to extricate the underlying potentials of multiculturalism as a tool for national unity and progress. The study concludes that positive aspects of multiculturalism should be adopted for the progress of the nation. It recommends that adequate policy should be put in place to properly harness the benefits of a multicultural society and play down on its defects for a better society

Keywords: Multi Cultural, Multi Ethnic, National Unity, Progress

Introduction

Nigeria is a plural state, made up of people from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. In 1914, Lord Lugard, the then British administrator fused different ethnic nationalities from both the southern and northern protectorates together for administrative purposes in what has come to be known as the Amalgamation of 1914. This singular act merged indigenous nationalities that have no historical lining together. Achimugu, Hassan, Ata-Agboni, U. Joy & Aliyu, Abdulahi agree that "the Nigerian federation is a marriage of over 400 ethnic nationalities whose consents were not sought in its formation" (46). Each of these ethnic nationalities spoke different languages. Anedo, Alexander Alfred Onukwube, submit that:

When the Europeans came to this area called Nigeria, they met many different groups hence the multiplicity of many peoples speaking different languages such as Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba, Fulani, Kanuri, Efik, Igala, Nupe, Urhobo, Itsekiri, Ijaw and hundreds of others. Many language groups in Nigeria then meant many independent nations (2).

"Multiculturalism defines a society that is predominantly composed of groups with different ethnic, geographic, religious and cultural roots which strive for equal positions on the markets of labor, goods and capital" (Jan M. Broekman 16). Michael Clyne and Dr James Jupp submit that "the whole world is multicultural" The above statement is simply saying world leaders have realized the importance of multiculturalism such that borders are being opened for people from different ethnic groups to cohabit to fully tapped the potentials of such cohabitation. "The sudden rise and equally rapid fall of One Nation in Australia is but one example" (Clyne and Jupp xvii). "In this 21st century...People of different cultures, castes, creed, colour, race and languages are living together as one family" (9), for example, countries like United States of America, Australia, Canada and India are multicultural nations made possible through state policies.

Sociologists agree that cultures are transmitted through the language of the people, the above report by Onukwube further show that these ethnic nationalities came with their culture, thus making the country a multicultural society. This no doubt, has brought cultural clash as most of the ethnic nationalities have refused to let go of their cultures. Prakash Babu & P Krishnamurthy likened multiculturalism as a coin with two sides which combines and confronts peoples and cannot "be denied that it can bring culture clash". They advice that different nationalities should "strive to lessen the differences among their groups

and avoid creating confusion among their groups” (9), while working to maximize the benefits inherent in multiculturalism. This is the trust of this work.

Theoretical Framework

This work is hinged on two theories: The Melting Pot theory and Salad Bowl Theory. The Melting Pot theory first rose to prominence when in 1782, through J. Hector St. John de Crevecoeur, an immigrant from France, described the demographic homogeneity of the United States as comprising “individuals of all nations....melted into a new race of men, whose labours and posterity will one day cause great changes in the world” (Mohamed Berray 142) The Melting Pot Theory is likened to a pot where different metals are melted under a high temperature. The outcome of the melted metals is fused to form a different product which cannot be separated from each other. This theory is best represented through the tea cup. When you add chocolate, milk and sugar in a tea cup, the whole product mixes to become inseparable but with a distinct taste. Muhammad Yasir Khan, Mohsin Latif, Rehan Khalid further state that theory immigrants should adopt the culture and customs and traditions of a new country

On the other hand, the salad bowl theory, propounded in 1959 by Historian Carl Degler, “sought a better image of cultural change than the older melting pot” (332). Worried that immigrants cultural distinctiveness seldom melted away in the melting pot theory, he agrees that they can contribute flavourfully to American society, while retaining their cultural identity. The ingredients for salad are made of a mixture of many vegetables depending on the choice and taste of the person preparing it. Some of the vegetables include: lettuce, white onions, cabbage, cucumber, carrot or cream. The mixture of all the different vegetables, garnished with a cream in a bowl is the salad. The beauty of the salad is that as you eat it, none of the fruits loses its taste as you recognize their different tastes in your mouth.

The salad bowl is likened to a country made up of different nationalities. Each of the nationalities, though fused together like a salad bowl, has refused to let go of their identities. This is typical of Nigeria with many ethnic nationalities fused together and existing as one nation yet, retained their cultural identities. According to Muhammad Yasir Khan, Mohsin Latif, Rehan Khalid “the important thing about the salad is that all the ingredients didn't lose their identity even they can be seen clearly and easily can be judged that which piece of vegetable is this”(63).

Summary of *IF... a tragedy of the ruled*

The play *IF... a tragedy of the ruled* by Ola Rotimi is a tale of political greed and its effects on the common man. It is set in a public compound and revolves around seven tenants from the different ethnic nationalities. The play further showcases the complexities of economic decadence of the nation and how it affects the people as a whole despite their varying works of life.

IF... a tragedy of the ruled reflects the life and conflict of ideology of tenants living in the same compound in Diobu Port Harcourt. The play begins in the forecourt of the compound with Mama Rosa plaiting Mama Ukot's hair. However, these women also gossip about the amorous relationship that exists between the Landlord and their co-tenant, Betty. Betty confronts these women immediately after the Landlord leaves her apartment but Papa and Dr. Dokubo intervene to stop the confrontation. Beyond this minute chaos, the tenants are further confronted by their Landlord's selective rent increase of the tenants because of their refusal to vote for him and his political party in the election. Enraged by the selective injustice from the landlord, the tenants resolve to stand as one to reject the Landlords threat and also seek redress in court.

Meanwhile, Mama is a cancer patient and has been booked for surgery in Lagos. However, she decides to celebrate her birthday which also coincides with her 40th wedding anniversary with Papa before leaving for Lagos for the surgery. Unfortunately, the Landlord decides to attend even without being invited. This causes tension that result to a physical humiliation of the Landlord by one of his tenants Garuba. Consequently, the Landlord evades the compound with police officers and tugs to harass and arrest Garuba and Betty, leading to the unfortunate death of Onyema, who is an asthmatic patient.

The main dramatic conflict in the play is the selective victimization of some tenants by the landlord over the former's refusal to support the Landlord's political ambition. Having failed to enforce

these tenants to take an oath to support his political aspiration, he issues some of the tenant's a notice of rent increase. Faced by what they conceive as injustice, the tenants convey a meeting to seek the appropriate direction in confronting their plight. While Papa underlines the Landlord's action as a punitive measure as he addresses his co-tenants below

Papa: ...If because we refuse to take oaths to vote for him in the coming elections, this now is his way of punishing us, fair enough. But let him punish all of us. No exceptions. I see divide and rule tactics at work here and we must resist them at all cost (13).

Hamidu, a medical doctor and co-tenant highlights the Landlord's selective injustice as a capitalist tendency of undergirding his selfish political and economic goals. Therefore, he sees the preferential exclusion of Papa, Betty and himself from the rent increase as part of the system of oppression that works in the favour of the capitalist.

Hamidu: First, you're not being asked to quit, sir. I don't think it's an oversight. The landlord wants to buy you over. That's what. He knows damned well that you're respected not only in this yard, but in the entire neighbourhood. And so the trick appear kind to the popular figure, and you'll hypnotise the populace for your own selfish ends. Pure capitalist gambit yanked straight off the precepts of Machiavellian stratagems. True, I didn't get the letter either. I think it's because my employers pay my rent direct to him. How much they pay? I don't know...(16).

Despite the challenging social realities confronting these tenants, Chinwe in her religious hypocrisy suggests that they *give unto Caesar what belongs to Caesar* rather than *vote for him or swear to his juju*. But her considerate suggestion is blatantly rejected by her co-tenants who note that the only way to resist the landlord's oppressive rule is not by partial compliance but absolute rejection. Therefore, they collectively agree not to comply with the rent increment but redress in court. The tenants resolve shows their knowledge of the political and social process of change that can lead to freedom from oppression. Despite their different cultural and ideological inclinations towards their collective problem they melt to agree on a common solution to this problem

Benefits of Multiculturalism

One of the benefits of multiculturalism is that it creates the opportunity for people to view problems from various perspectives which is in line with the salad bowl theory. More so, multiculturalism encourages a collective approach towards problem solving in society, this also aligns with the melting pot theory. As it is generally believed that variety is the spice of life, there is no doubt therefore, that the coming together of people from different cultural background has many gains which need to be tapped for the development, wellbeing and growth of the congregating society. Xunwu Chen admits that:

The co-existence of multicultures can be accompanied by greater good. The co-existence of multicultures makes life more challenging... For example, the co-existence of multicultures in a society creates a more spacious room for human freedom and creativity in the society. The co-existence of multicultures also constitutes a driving force for individuals, societies, nations and peoples to expand their minds and horizons. Only if individuals, societies, nations, and peoples expand their mind and horizons can they see what the poet George Gordon Byron called "a wide realm of wild reality," or what the philosopher Zhuangzi called "the realm of the endless and limitless," appreciating adequately the sun above and rivers and mountains below. Multi-cultures of a society create a situation in which only the real can endure, the better can triumph, the substantial can stand, and the one with strength can move forward (3).

It based on the above assertion that this work discusses the gains of a multicultural society embedded in Ola Rotimi's *"IF... a tragedy of the ruled"*. Despite coming from different social- cultural backgrounds, the ability to fuse into one and collectively take a unified decision to better their tomorrow is one of the benefits of a multicultural society. In *"IF... a tragedy of the ruled"*, when the landlord gave some of the tenants quit notice and rent increment because they refused to accept to vote for his party, the tenants unanimously agreed to call his bluff and stood their ground. This is demonstrated by the address of Papa who was neither issued a quit notice nor rent increment, but solidly stood behind his co-tenants, where he advises his co- tenants to shun clannishness or brotherhood or even "landlordhood" but rather to vote right as to right the wrong. According to him:

PAPA : ...the people then are the last hope for safeguarding that ethics through the kinds of person they put in power. That is the language you must speak tomorrow with your votes. You know the candidates. They are rice; our votes , the water... it is when you pour it water that the empty husks floats... any vote cast for a politician tomorrow on the basis of sheer fatherhood by birth, or of brotherhood by clan or sisterhood by religion is your doom and my doom. Our last hope then is in a sound government that will inspire a forthright judiciary (14-15).

Another gain derived from this analysis is due process. The tenants should have taken action by themselves when they perceive any maltreatment. However, rather than take laws into their hands, they resorted to follow due process to get justice. Again, Papa advises them on how to channel their grievances as he counsels thus:

PAPA: meanwhile, we bide our time. We'll write to the landlord and tell him- one, we regard his letter discriminatory and vindictive... two, he should reconsider his decision to increase the rents.

Betty also follows due process in reporting her case to Papa to warn her co-tenant against gossiping with her name as she intones:

BETTY: Tank sah. My own be say di munu-munu talk wey dem take me talk for this house, e too much. Ah-ah, true true me and Landlord dey walka but I know myself. Na who say fowl no dey swaet for body, because feder no gree person see sweat...

The need of always show appreciation of individual efforts in a multicultural setting was also highlighted. Hamidu's address to Papa was to appreciate his efforts in joining hands with fellows tenants who are being marginalized, victimized and oppressed by the landlord. First, he encourages them to be united, pointing out the consequences of not being united.

Hamidu: I am glad sir that you have not fallen for that capitalist inducement by counting yourself out of the matter. My second point. Your decision to bide your time. It is very wise that is IF the masses, the oppressed masses – again for a change will use their votes as a tool for their own freedom. IF that fails, then struggles becomes imperative...solidarity. The day our solidarity dissolves is the day our humanity ends and our worthlessness begins... Nobody should be deemed useless in a struggle against oppression... nobody is useless. That is why your insisting that Betty join us in ths struggle is commendable (16/17).

Continuing, he admonished them to be united and shun hate for their struggle to succeed.

Hamidu: ... the greatest obstacle we have to face in this struggle is not power of the oppressors, not the trickery of reactionaries. No. the greatest obstacle we have is Hate. Why? Because, when a people are oppressed long enough,

they grow to hate and fight themselves while secretly admiring the oppressor.

The need to live upright life and condemn evil acts was emphasized in the play. This is exemplified through Chinwe, another cast from one of the socio-cultural backgrounds, who did not support Onyema's action of trying to assist Kalada, despite his perceived good intention. According to Onyema, Mr Peter has been misappropriating the "Bob a job" collections and he decides to dodge 10 naira to give to Kalada for his registration. This was out rightly condemned by Chinwe.

Chinwe: I... hope you did not take the N10 from the bob-a-job collection...But if you have- it's a mistake. Now tell me the truth. Onyema: the good Lord doesn't approve of such a thing

Onyema: To help a poor boy

Chinwe: Stealing is a sin

Onyema: Ehen- so what has God done to Mr Peters the biggest thief of all?

Chinwe: That's not for you to judge. If Mr Peters is a thief, that doesn't mean you should be a thief.

Onyema: I am not a thief

Chinwe: I am not saying you're a thief. All I am saying is: return not evil for evil... I will give you my own N10 for your Kalada... (23).

Preaching peace and helping the needy without counting cultural inclination or tribe was very visible in the play. This was exemplified by Banjo, a Yoruba who advises the Fisherman from Kalabari not to carry arms or revolt against the government or her agencies but to live peacefully with his neighbours. He carefully explained to the Fisherman that the oil companies were permitted or licensed to operate by the government as oil is the life wire of the nation and "government will arrest anybody who disturb the oil men" (27) or their operation.

Also, the show of love as extended by the neighbours when they heard a cry of pain from Mama's room as her health gets worse is worthy of emulation in a multicultural society such as ours. From the stage directions:

... as Chinwe and Betty abandon their bible class to look for Papa; Chinwe disappears into Papa's room. Betty heads for where Papa and the children are. Hamidu darts out of his room wielding a stethoscope and a medical kit, racing towards room...everyone in the yard is standing with solemn concern, peering in the direction of Papa's room. Chinwe and Betty soon reemerge from Papa's room and approach members of the bible class (34).

Chinwe: Its our mother... Pray for her brethren. She is in great pain.

Leader: O blessed Lord, the father of mercies, we beseech thee look down in pity and compassion upon thy servant grieved with sickness. Grant her thy peace in body and spirit O Lord

Again, the love for togetherness is further exhibited when Dr Dokubo offers to take Mama to his house for close observation:

Onyema: Is mama going to the hospital now?

Dr. Dokubo: No. I am only taking her to my place for the night. Just to observe her.

Summary

This study examined multiculturalism as a tool for National Development: a case study of *IF...a tragedy of the ruled*. The two theories: the boiling pot and the salad bowl theories served as the theoretical framework for the study. A multicultural society is one where different people from different cultural backgrounds cohabit. The melting pot theory accounts for their doggedness at peaceful cohabitation. The boiling pot refines all the ingredients to unite and speak with one voice, without recognizing their ethnic differences, thus producing a distinct taste devoid of ethnic colouration. On the other hand, the salad theory aptly represents a multicultural society where different salad ingredients are mixed together but sweetened with a cream. Each of the cohabiting groups retaining its taste. The play further exemplifies a multicultural yard, made up of people from many ethnic nationalities yet they exhibited great tolerance for each other while retaining their cultural identities. On the other hand,

The principal character in the play, Papa, represents the Nigeria's Federal Government. His very accommodating nature should be emulated to foster peace. He never discriminated, was ever willing to assist his neighbours and was very fair in his dealing with his co tenants. Even when adverse decisions did not directly affect him, he stood with the marginalized as he truly believed that injury to one is injury to all. He retained his identity, respected the identity of others, yet "melted" into one for peace, unity and progress of all the tenants.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study extricates the usefulness of multiculturalism which include, unity of purpose, love for one another, solidarity, support for each other, appreciation of individual worth and efforts, following due process in handling challenges and resolving conflicts between each other and most importantly, speaking with one voice. The study recommends that the different advantages accruable in a multicultural society such as those enumerated above, should be tapped in Nigeria and maximally utilized for the progress of the country, while playing down on the disadvantages such as hate, feeling of superior and favouritism. Again, the respect for each culture should be encouraged in Nigeria to foster cohesion and togetherness.

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