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The Inextricability of Literature and National Integration in Nation Building: A Study of Sunnie Ododo's Hard Choice

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ABSTRACT
The strength and survival of a multiethnic and religious society like Nigeria strongly depends on the integration of its ethnic nationalities. Today, the trust for one another among the Nigerian citizens has gradually eroded away. Presently, the nation' nationalists' vision of unity in diversity is under serious threat because of tribal/religious and political differences. Deploying sociological critical procedures in the explicatory textual analyses, the paper attempts to explicate Sunnie Ododo's Hard Choice as a viable alternative to national integration in nation building. Considering devastating effects of the current fierce ethno/religious, political rivalries and incessant killings, the paper seeks to establish the reliability of the Nigerian playwrights' ideological stance in promoting national integration among various ethnic and religious groups in the country. It concludes that for a plural society like Nigeria to successfully manage the present social in the country in order to revamp threatened national peace and unity, the leaders should be patriotic and the led must imbibe the spirit of national unity. Both the leaders and led should as a matter of necessity do everything possible to tackle acts that undermine the country's nationalists' vision for unity in diversity towards national integration.
Key words: National-integration, Tribalism, Peace, National unity, Social-anomie

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is a multiethnic and multicultural society country with an estimated population of 167million people, 49.6% of which are females (NPC, 2007). It made up of diverse cultural groups with Hausa in the north, Yoruba in the South- West and the Igbo in South-cast as her major cultural and language groups. Other cultural/language minority groups include the Jukun, Igala, Nupe, Ijaw, Tiv, Ibiobio, Ebirra, Mumuye, Fulani, Fulfulde, Bachama, Bura, Kutep, Lunguda, Yanda, Michiłka. Birom, Kakanda, Yargen, Calabar, Mbula, Margi, Kaka, Kanuri, EGk, Uhorobo, Itsckiri, Idoma, Benia, Baruba, Igede and many others. These ethnic groups share a lot in common and even inter-marry. Majoritics in the northern Nigeria practice Islamic religion while the south is predominantly of Christian faith and Islamic religion. Binebai (2016) critically observes that; the multicultural nature of the Nigerian nation has for a long time brought about ethnic rivalry and it is the reason for discrimination, oppression and ethnocentrism."

With such diverse cultural groups, one would expect that by now it recognize and value her socio-cultural differences but unfortunately it does not. It is rather bewildered by fierce division along tribal, religious and political affiliations. Today, ethnic, political as well as religious cleavages are serious challenges that are scourging national identity of its citizens because the plurality and diversity breeds differences and lack of understanding and intolerance which hinders people from accepting the differences and appreciating others. As such people feel insecure because they do not trust each other to collectively

champion their cause for a much desired society. In recent time, ethnic groups that have been living together in peace and harmony suddenly are at daggers drawn. It is against this background that this paper attempts to examine Sunnie Ododo's Hard Choice as a Viable Tool for National Integration in nation building.

The Social Bonds among Ethnic Groups in Nigeria

The question is what is the social bond among Nigerians in recent time? Nigeria the State of National Unity is presently in a state of endangerment as there is a weak social bond among various ethnic groups in the country. In fact, in recent time, there is fierce mutual suspicion, hatred, bitterness, lack of trust, intolerance among different ethnic groups in different parts of the country which constitute a threat to our peaceful coexistence as Nigerians. This is evident in the recent incessant killings in Benue, Plateau, Taraba, Adamawa; Kaduna, Imo, Anambra among other states and other conflicts in the country that have left a deep scar on our psyche which have further deepens the mutual suspicion and hatred among Nigerians. Consequently, people's perception are becoming inclined to their ethno/religious and political affiliations making the nation a mere geographical expression devoid of national unity. Secondly, what are the threats confronting Nigeria's national unity? Obviously, the recent happenings in the country show that the nation's unity and peace is endangered as the love and rust for one another in Nigeria has diminished. For individual's self ends the unity of the country in diversity has been compromised and highly politicized. Today, people find it so easy to separate or kill over farmland matters, allocation of natural resources, border disputes and kinship issues or ethnic, cultural, religious and political differences. Kayinde (2009) lend credence lo this when he observes that; "..what we experience today in the country is a shattered hope. The vision of the country's nationalist for unity in diversity is becoming a nightmare." This constitutes a threat to the survival of the nation's democracy as well as her cooperate entity and existence.

No doubt, the atrocities committed by warring ethnic groups in different parts of the country today are worse than the worst of genocide of ethnic learning between Tutsi and Hutu rebels in Rwanda 1994. That is why the Global Peace Index's (GPI) report of 2018 portrays the nation as the 15" most dangerous country in the world and the most consistently unsecured country in the West African region because of the extent of domestic and internal violent conflicts in the society. This report reveals that the nation's unity in diversity is increasingly eroding. It also portrays Nigeria as a nation devoid of peace and national unity as a result of complete disappearance of the common sense of solidarity. Unfortunately, there seem to be no solution in sight to the unending conflicts of ethnic rivalry, religious intolerance and political differences. This is why the need for national integration at this critical time is non-negotiable.

Drama and National Integration towards managing Social Anomie

Drama is one of the literary genres that checkmate the activities of man in the society so the socio-political happenings in the society cannot be divorced from it. It creates awareness with the view of changing any disturbing phenomenon. To Osofisan (2001) "drama reflects the agonies of the time, the hope of the time, show a way out of all problems and condemns negative forces." Contemporary drama like other genres of literature is the product of life that magnifies the state of socio-political quagmires that bedevilled the nation's wheel of progress as well as conscientizes thoughtful Nigerians to collectively rise and denounce those habits that cripple the aspiration of the nation. It sensitizes the people towards a positive and desirable solidarity and progress in human life. This invariably depicts that drama conscientizes the people of any given society that has lost its consciousness towards national development. Osofisan (2091) lends credence to this when he observes that; "development begins from consciousness. If you don't really know what is really happening, how can you do anything about it?"

National integration is a process of creating a sense of national consciousness, uniqueness of identity and loyalty among people with different socio-cultural identities (racial, ethnic, language, religion etc.) into single territorial political society. It is the result of social force that are external to individual that work together to create the social phenomenon of the shared set of beliefs, values and ideas that compose it. It is also a situation where a group of people are bound together as one for the performance of national contract through the support for each other or for one another. It is about valuing our fellow human beings

and respecting who they are as well as living with them in harmony as neighbours as instructed in both the Holy Bible and the Holy Quran for our peaceful coexistence.

Nigerian dramatists are at constant disagreement with issues that affect the solidarity of their milieu. The idea of what makes a plural society work has been the main thrust of most contemporary drama. Most committed dramatists use their literary works to promote and enhance people's knowledge and awareness of good or immoral action thereby warning them of any form of action that may lead to their disintegration. To the dramatists the Nigerian situation remains the way it has ever been because people are not united and patriotic. This is because no plural society can develop without natienal solidarity in the face of challenges. According to Binebai (2016):

Ododo is a writer with great passion for national consciousness. His creative imagination is tranquil and follows the fundamental law of nature. He stands up for the cause of national consciousness in a multicultural setting like Nigeria and asserts his dramaturge in a world of fading moral values and fast diminishing collective identity.

Osofisan (2001) lends credence to this as he observes that:

We have many people that are working alone. They are all alone voices...and they have not been able to bring change because they never try to come together to plan a collective strategy to come out together and defeat the wrong they have been talking about.

Apparently, no plural society can survive without the dramatist's vision of national integration. To Binebai, (2016) The national drama has the solutions to the problems of this nation.." The happenings in the socio-political sphere of the society often impose a burden on the dramatists whose struggle has been dictated by their spate of different forms of strategies towards national integration. This is to make people uncomfortable and aware that they have common destiny with a view of re-ordering their psyches. To Osofisan (2008) the role of the dramatist is; "To educate the people and weld them together and tell them we have a common destiny, a common problem...we have to stick together and build a national structure." This means the continuous ethno-religious crisis and killings in the country today is total absence of respect and tolerance for one another which are the core values that strengthen a nation's unity in diversity

It is in this light, that the Nigerian dramatists rise to safeguard the nation through the moral content in their work. or Osofisan (2001) drama; "must be used to play its role in the advancement of the society in the urgent need against... the insidious spread of fascism." To Binebai (2016; "The Nigerian dramatist have for long concerned themselves with dramas that deal with the challenges of national unity as a result of the centrifugal nature and ethnocentric struggles amongst ethnic nationalities that make ur the nation." Textual Analysis Ododo's Hard Choice is a contemporary drama that depicts national integration for a peaceful coexistence in Nigeria. Bincbai (20116): lends credence to this:

In Hard Choice Ododo *creates a bold picture of national consciousness. In # plural setting and sermonizes that intolerance, ethnocentrism, or ethnic selfishness, individual geocentricism oro greed be sacrificed for the emergence of a new and better multicultural society where peace and justice shall reign*.

In the play Ododo uses Eze Okiakoh and Princess Azingae as symbolic characters in the play to articulate national integration in Nigeria, Eze Okiakoh is built in the play with the spirit of ethnic tolerance and diversity of culture. Despite the opposition and resistance to his daughter's marriage, he accepted it. His acceptance is an idea that depicts the clamour towards alliance for a new united Nigeria. This attests Ododo's approval of a new Nigeria to emerge after Eze Okiakoh's exit from the throne. Thus, Eze Okiakoh states:

Love that binds and unites shall be your companion always. The freshness and purity of the morning dew shall be the sustaining tonic of this new home. The sweet-soothing spirit of our ancestors will forever abide by you two. God Himself shall be your guide. Like the butterfly and flower, so shall the fragrance of your romance attract peace to our different kingdoms? And there shall be no regret

coming together. So shall it be (12)

Obviously, this dialogue reveals the act of ethnocentrism and indigenous differences shown among Nigerians To the people losing the throne of Emepiri kingdom of the lbos to the Yoruba Kingdom of Igedu is an abomination and would lead to their marginalization, Chief Ubanga: Declares that:

The Eze I'm sorry for all of these. Our action too was precipitated for the common good of our people. Even though you overruled my position, I still maintain that the betrothal of the Princess to Prince Oki would indirectly throw our kingdom into slavery (37)

Eze Okiakoh in response, asserts that:

And the only way to protest against my decision is to organize the theft of a crown of another kingdom? Does it occur o you that, that alone can bring a serious curse upon our kingdom forever? All crowns are ancestral properties linked to the divine centre of celestial realm that God himself superintends. When you invite hardship upon the very people you claim you want to protect, can God forgive you? No, He would move to set things right: and when He moves, who can stand? No one, or can you? (37).

Chief Ubanga:

I'm not persuaded your highness. The gods and God will never approve that an Igedu Prince becomes the king of Emepiri kingdom. Unfortunately, you're the only one who thinks otherwise just to keep faith with some unguided promise made behind your council of chiefs. This is a state affair and not a domestic one. Besides, it wasn't my idea. Yes, we planned a protest but abducting the crown wasn't part of the plan (37-38).

EzeOkiakoh: If' I may ask, whose idea? (58)

This is the pertinent question Ododo wants us to answer in order to unite and crush all forces working against their peaceful coexistence. To Ododo until we accept our differences and collectively make 'hard choices', our dream for national integration will continue to elude us. In the play Eze Okiakolr is a prototypal character who represents national conscience and who sides with the clamour for national integration. His acceptance and clamour for interethnic marriage in the play affirms his endorsement of a new Nigeria to emerge after his exit from the throne.

For a plural nation like Nigeria to move forward it needs the character of Princess Azingae as she portends a sacrifice for the emergence of new Nigeria. She displays patriotism and nationalism as she rubbishes her mother's wishes to carry the burdens to the gods of Emepiri kingdom to avert war and save lives. When Prince Oki advised her to elope, she says;

It's too late Prince Oki. Can we really escape from our shadows? No. The life of our father, the king of Igedu kingdom, and that of the entire people of Emepiri kingdom are enmeshed in this atmosphere. It would only take a life, to save them and you want me to walk away? (46-47)

In response Prince Oki asks further: what then happens to me? She responds that:

Please don't be selfish. In due season, the sun and the moon shall fuse together for celestial edification. My love, my heart yearns for a new world devoid of acrimony and rancour amongst kingdoms. As I paint that world with my blood, you stay to animate it for all to enjoy... Kiss my feet and bid me farewell...(47)

Princess Azingae's tragic and sacrificial death marks the beginning of the death of ethno/religious differences in Nigeria. According to Bincbai (2016:111):

Princess Azingae decoration of Prince Oki with her coral beads reaffirm the vision both share. It is the vision to unite two kingdoms so that a new world may sprout. In Ododo's proverbial words, spoken by Princess Azingae that; in death life is found and in life our dreams are secured, creates deep impression of his sense of nationalism in which sacrifices are made for good things to happen.

CONCLUSION

No doubt drama is an indispensable viable tool for national integration. Indeed the play is infused with national integration as it makes no pretense of promoting unity and peaceful coexistence in Nigeria. As a people we cannot continue to be hysterical of the nation's present conundrum resulting to the present social anomie. As Achebe (1983) would advise; "we need to look back and try and find out where we went wrong, where the rain began to beat us." The plays incisively demonstrate collective actions towards managing the Nigeria's social anomie. The commitment of the Nigerian contemporary playwrights in art is considered in this study beyond mere propaganda.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Nigerian leaders must encourage inter-ethnic and inter-religious marriages as this could foster national integration and strengthen religious ties among Nigerians.
- The Government must promote cultural re-orkntation awareness. This can be done by strengthening the National Orientation Agency (NOA) to encourage Nigerians to learn languages, eat the food and wear the traditional dresses of one another.
- The formation of Nigerian political parties should have national outlook or assume national character
- The government must make conscious effort in promoting public education and equal opportunities for all socio-cultural groups in Nigeria for national integration.
- Strengthening the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) Scheme. More incentive such as automatic employment, cash donations, awards etc. should be given to outstanding corps members who served in other states outside their cultural areas
- Promoting religious tolerance- good and responsible leadership to give a sense of belonging among Nigerians
- Providing equal access to representation in Government. The application of federal character or quota principle in appointments into position in government at all levels will help achieve equal access to representation.
- The leaders cannot do it alone, there must be holistic solidarity among us and we must see ourselves as 'Nigerians' whose first love and loyalty lies with the nation than our tribes and political affiliations.

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