

## Cultural Discord, Hostility and Destructive Consequences: Dramatic Perspectives

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### Abstract

Culture is a compendium of social behaviour, norms and values found in human society. In most instances, culture refers to beliefs, accumulated experiences which came to be a way of life. When two cultures come in contact there is always cultural discord. This paper examines cultural discord that occurred between Owa people and their English colonizers as presented in *Iredi War* by Sam Ukala; and the conflict which occurred between Obiorah, his Afro-American wife and Obiorah's village folks in Nwabueze's *Echoes of Madness*. In *Iredi War* by Ukala, the high-handed assistant commissioner struggles to displace the traditional values of Owa people to his English culture and dies as Owa people rise against his hostility to preserve their way of life. In Nwabueze's *Echoes of Madness* Brenda's pride of superior culture even pushed her to call the custodians "bald-headed folks" (Nwabueze, 11). Her negative vibes affect her husband's people's consciousness; it destroyed their sanity and left them insane. They snatch her bag took her and kill her. Hostility against each other led to catastrophic consequences because the characters refused to apply cultural democracy. For the different cultures to coexist there must be adaptation of multiculturalism. The theory multiculturalism describes a way a society handles cultural diversity as it exists between the groups portrayed in the plays. The study reveals that Sam Ukala and Emeka Nwabueze as custodians of culture opened our eyes to the pressure of abandoning traditional cultural pattern in favour of the alien and the pressure of 'sophiscated' culture in its bid to swallow the prevailing one with the usual

psychological stress that leads to lamentable consequences. The playwrights present the discord tactfully with their catastrophic consequences.

**Keywords:** Culture, discord, hostility, consequences, drama.

### I

A social group is always identified with distinctive customs, arts, social institutions and other manifestations of human and intellectual beliefs which mark their essential generic characters. Culture is human symbolic expressions through religious practices as rituals, expressive arts, festival celebrations, and patterns of consumption. But cultural universals are found in all human societies. They have been mentioned by anthropologist like George Murdock and others; and can be defined as anything common that exist in every human culture on the planet yet varies from different culture to culture, such as values and modes of behaviour. (Lumen Learning, Cultural Universals) Donald Brown calls it human universals. In his book *Human Universals*, he submits that "those features of culture, society, language, behaviour, and psyche for which there are no known exception." He made a list of hundreds of items he suggests to be universals under the following subheadings: language and cognition, society, beliefs, and technology (Donald's List in *Human Universals*), but they differ because cultures develop differently in different environments. 'One culture is a unique mix of ideas struggling and competing; it is never exactly the same in two places' (The is Engmann, Why Culture Differ).

Cultural disparities exist in certain beliefs, attitudes, languages, various practices, and other expressions that are identifiable with members of a specific society. It is these differences that lead to cultural discord especially among the ignorant who can hardly tolerate others without knowing that cultural difference means different ways of doing the same thing. In the same way people practice different religions such as

works) of culture, Sam Ukala and Emeka Nwabueze open the eyes of the audience to the prevailing problems of the pressure to abandon traditional cultural patterns in favour of alien ones, pressure of sophisticated culture in the bid to swallow the prevailing culture, and the usual considerable psychological stress that leads to lamentable consequences. Such consequences are normally psychological and it occurs when a society is helpless to resist massive cultural and strong pressure to abandon their traditional and cultural patterns in favour of sophisticated one. The situation likely calls for ugly conflict and confrontation of 'us and them' which consistently cause dichotomy in the whole universe. In his description of dichotomy Mazrui holds that:

Dichotomy can take a variety of forms- the native versus the foreigner, the friend versus the foe, the familiar versus the strange, the Orient versus the West, the North versus the South, the developed versus undeveloped countries, and so on; this dichotomous framework of world perceptions amounts to iron law of dualism, a persistent conceptualization of the of us and them (214).

### **Multiculturalism as the Theoretical Anchor**

It is expected that people of different cultures can live in peace with each other even as matter of policy. This concerns many cultures existing side by side in harmony. This is another aspect of cultural phenomenon which is confirmed by Asika, as "another part of cultural studies" (422). It is predominantly identified with American critics perhaps because of the interrelated condition of American states. It can also be identified in other places with similar contexts. Multiculturalism describes a way a society handles cultural diversity. Robert Longley asserts that "multiculturalism expresses the view that society is enriched, respecting, and even encouraging cultural diversity" (Thought Co, What is multiculturalism? Definitions, Theories, and Examples). Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy holds that Multiculturalism "is about how to understand and respond to the challenges of cultural and religious

diversities" (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy). Lonely recalls that in "2001, the General Conference of UNESCO took this position when it asserted in its Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity that ... "cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature" (What is multiculturalism? Definitions, Theories, and Examples, ThoughtCo.). This culminate to this fact that people of different cultural background must come together for one reason or the other and when such occurs it is important that those involved must apply acculturation to ensure peaceful coexistence. This is exactly what the playwrights are trying to portray. What Ukala is trying to suggest is that the assistant British District Commissioner, Crewe –Read and Owa people would have benefited from increased diversity through harmonious coexistence if they adhere to the tenets of multiculturalism. The blame is more on Crewe – Read who would demand Owa to turn overnight to his way of life which is alien to them. Nwabueze in his effort expresses that the society Obiorah and Brenda met would have been 'enriched' if they respected and even acknowledged cultural diversity.

### **II**

*Iredi War* by Sam Ukala is a play he uses to create the 1906 uprising of the people of Owa Kingdom now in Ika North- East Local Government Area of Delta State Nigeria against the British colonial oppression. The play is a typical reconstruction of past events in this twenty-first Century. Owa people called the oppression 'Iredi War' captioned from the name of the Assistant District Commissioner, O S Crewe-Read who spear-headed the discord. *Iredi War* describes the high- handedness of the assistant commissioner as he struggles to displace the traditional values of Owa Kingdom to his English culture. This struggle for cultural dominance which is encountered in the battle by Owa Kingdom for their cultural preservation are all illuminated in Ukala's 'folkist' play.

The British District Commissioner, Mr. Chichester had come into Owa acknowledging the disparities between the culture of his people and of

Owa Kingdom. As a wise man he tolerates and respects the culture of the majority. He understood the need to adopt a common set of social norms between him and the indigenes. Igboba, the Obi of Owa Kingdom, a man whose philosophical experience, ability to discern inner qualities of human relationships and sense of judgments has placed him above other members of his society, struggles for perspectives for a common ground for inter culture. But before this convention could be achieved, a "power hungry and a power- drunk...young and inexperienced" (38) Crew-Read was sent to replace Mr. Chichester. The playwright portrays Owa people responding to adverse changes brought about by the overzealous Crewe-Read. Due to his high- handedness, Owa people experienced adverse cultural changes and depressing encounters on her heritage. He destroys the cordial relationship anticipated by Igboba and Chichester and is ready to destroy anything or anybody that works against his plan of taking over the administration of the kingdom. His aim is to introduce Christianity, improve technology, and change the culture which he sees as inferior. He continually reminds Owa people that their culture is a joke. He negates the cultural reception given to him at Igboba's palace and condemns the people's manner of praying instead opted to pray during his reception. The playwright presents his prayers as a portrayal of pompous and over blown words embellished with a chorus of Amen from his members.

Chief Igboba pours libations and breaks kola which symbolizes his welcome, but he refuses all. And with his negative attitude Crewe-Read rejects acculturation; then makes himself an ignoramus that fails to understand that he needs to adjust to the culture of a larger group before simultaneously and concurrently introducing his own culture in a situation of mutual understanding if there is any need.

From this stand, it becomes obvious that the Assistant Commissioner is not aware that there are many similarities between his culture and that of the natives. In the administration of the kingdom, Igboba is at the highest hierarchy followed by other subordinates in the system; similarly the

British people have their authoritative officials organized in nested ranks. Their highest in rank is His Majesty King Edward VII king of the United Kingdom and British Dominion. Both parties believe that the Supreme God is the highest and supreme ruler. But when the people of Owa talks about the Almighty God, Crewe-Read sees it unacceptable. At this misunderstanding, Igboba meekly explains to him: "Mr. DC, we do not know your god. Our fathers did not introduce him to us. That is why we do not offer him kola and palm wine"(Ukala, 16). Crewe-Read arrogantly responds: "Chief Igboba, your fathers were primitive, ignorant, uncivilized and barbarians" (Ukala16). Even an imbecile would feel offended by Crewe-Read's insolent and contemptuous statement against the ancestors of Owa Kingdom. This is a mere expression of cultural superiority. And it is this cultural superiority that breeds discord and intensifies hostility between Owa and the colonists while they struggle to overcome the devastating blows on their inheritance.

Wherever there is no agreement or harmony in handling of affairs in a relationship, the result is discord. Ukala presents this conflict tactfully with its catastrophic consequences: it resulted in the murder of Crewe-Read with many people at the helm of affairs from the British side while Owa young men were also slaughtered in cold blood during the struggle for supremacy.

Despite the destructive atmosphere, the playwright is still able to depict the African value. He proves that an African ruler in a typical African setting deserves great respect. The play also appraised some powers possessed by Africans. In the play, Nneka uses her magical power to cast pebbles, pieces of irons and big needles into a soldier's flank by just stretching out her right hand to the air; Lawani attempted a shoot at Iwekuba, the gun magically went numb; when Rudkin's soldier wanted to shoot a gun at Igboba and his subordinates, his hand hung in the air in a supernatural manner. These powers are either powerless to an extent or they are negatively used. That is perhaps why Africans still gave in to the

forces of colonialism even with those intimidating powers.

There is something in the character of Chief Igboba which should be emulated by the present African rulers; that is the way Chief Igboba surrenders himself to the colonial masters because of his subjects held by the alien forces and proves himself as a persistent defender of the people he governs. He addresses Chichester concerning his subjects at the custody of the colonists to prove his defence and solidarity:

CHIEF IGBOBA: ...listen, if my people deserve to die by hanging because they dared to defend their father land against oppressive aggression from your people, I desire to die with them because they ran my errand. Take me to them. If I must live even in exile, my people must live also. Exile will end one day, whether you like it or not, and I need my subjects, for what is a king without subjects? Owa will need them, for what is a kingdom without people? (Ukala, 95)

### III

There is also another dimension of cultural discord in the work of Emeka Nwabueze in his *Echoes of Madness*. Its main crux is portrayal of non-conformity to Igbo social values by Obiora and Brenda and its subsequent calamity. Obiora studied in America where he married an Afro-American. Both come back to be established at home. Their home coming coincided with Obiora's appointment as the new chief priest of the village. Obiora is already absorbed in the culture of his wife who is ethnocentric and racially biased. Obiora's words and reactions against his people's demands are clear evidence of xenocentrism. He becomes a bat that perches on the fence between the two cultures. When the divination was made and result was Obiora, Nzeduba raised his brows:

My people, there is snake in the rafters. We have a thread wearily or kiss the fangs of death ...Osuofia, our diviner told us that the gods have chosen a new person to replace the old priest, but we know the

person he has chosen as his successor is living in the land of the white man... I raised a voice of protest but I was told one does not doubt the potency of an oracle invoked by the acolyte of the ancestors...(Nwabueze, 5)

As if in alliance, Odukwe expresses his fear over the possibility of Obiora's acceptance of such ancestral position when his wife does not even speak Igbo. Another fear he expressed was Obiora's possibility of coming home. To this, Osuofia promised to perform rituals that would force him home. So, when he came home Nzeduba tried to convince him that the deity has brought him home to replace the dead chief priest after all: "there's a shorter road to your father's house but you chose the one that passes through the shrine. That indicates that Avuja supports your selection as his chief priest" (Nwabueze,12). Obiora refutes the claim. But said that not only that he travelled his usual road, he came back because he had "a big job as director of a newly created government parastatal...(while his wife) will go into the business to help this damn country by contributing to its economic development"... (Nwabueze,13) Obiora sees the demand for him to become a chief priest of a deity, a worshipper of Avuja as an echo of madness for an American trained man. To him again it is total dementia for his people to force him to leave wife and marry a village girl they recommended. He sees these cultural demands as aberrations to the American standard. His rejection of his kinsmen's 'imposed culture' made them regard his attitude as a derangement and he suffers from what Bakke Edward portrays as a carrier of imposed culture (Bakke, 355).

Cultures may be different but the worship of the Supreme Being is universal and substantially consequential though the approaches of worship may be different. There is also universality of marriage institution, yet ways and methods are quite different. The same thing applies to the selection of priests who would mediate between the people and the Supreme Being. The method each society applies leads to the same destination. It is like cooking the same food in different ways. The culture of a group influences their thoughts, actions characters and of

course their destinies. That was the reason Abraham asked his trustworthy servant to go to his relatives to get a wife for Isaac (Genesis 24: 3-4). He desired a woman who shares the same culture with them. David Krech et al affirm that:

Once a group accepts a given arrangement, and the arrangement becomes a typical means of coping with a problem, it is transmitted to new members of the society as the approved way, and very frequently as the only decent or civilized way... failure to recognize the diverse ways in various peoples of the world cope with universal problem makes for misunderstanding and conflict (Krech et al 344).

As a result, every society sticks to their culture even if it is universally unacceptable and pessimistic. Onuama clan has refused to see through the eyes of Obiora that the worship of carved images which they call deities is aberrant. There is also other binding philosophy of an Igbo man – brotherliness hewed into the extended family system which Obiora ignorantly ignores. Moreover, in the present times the family members are not completely obliged to choose a wife for their son, the son at the same time should not scare everybody away because his training in the school kept everybody at home hungry. "And those that sow in tears shall reap in joy" (Psalm 126: 5). Therefore, Obiora's Afro- American wife should not interfere with the good aspect of African culture in her selfishness and mere show of cultural superiority because no culture is good all through. She is expected to acculturate. To affirm this Ugwu holds that they need to "create an avenue for cultural democracy, and remove the prevalence of what may be described as dominant culture, destroying patterns of allegiance in opposition" (Ugwu, 189).

When the 'patterns of allegiance' gets destroyed, Chinwe, Obiora's half-sister reacts obtusely. She laments and justifies her irrational action:

Only a person who doesn't know how much we've suffered for Obiora will blame us for whatever way we've decided to treat

him...our dead father treated him like a king. He sold our land even our house in the city to train him in school... poor mother died of poverty and heart break because of Obiora... now that same boy has returned with a stick which he calls a wife to destroy our life...the memory ...hunts me like evil spirit (Nwabueze 31).

Obiora destroyed the patterns of allegiance of his own culture by failing to adhere to something which he is bound by duty. That 'something' is his obligation to his parents who lost their valuables in order to see him through his studies abroad. He owes allegiance to the parents for all they spent on him. He should at least care for them at least a year or two before even thinking of marriage. Besides, his siblings were deprived a lot of just to see him through in the school, those sibling should not be abandoned while dancing only to the tune of the alien wife he is very weak to control; and whose culture negates extended family system.

In her pride, Brenda manipulates Obiora to abandon the values that molded him. Pride in any way, whether cultural, racial, intellectual is equal to suicide; it is toxic. The reaction meted by Obiora's people against him and his wife is fired by Brenda's pride. She even calls the custodians of her husband's people "bald -headed folks" (Nwabueze, 11). Her negative vibes affect her relations-in-laws' consciousness, it destroyed their sanity and left them insane. At the climax, Akamuonye arranges with Dimgba and other unscrupulous youths to snatch Brenda's bag which they thought contained much money and killed her. They steal Obiora's documents and collect his wares from the wharf.

## Conclusion

Whenever people from different cultural backgrounds come together there are dissimilarities in values, beliefs, needs or priorities, aims and methods of competing and achieving goals. These differences breed discord. The different philosophies are what the playwrights are trying to convey through their works. In Ukala's *Iredi War* the artist displays cultural dominance and power control exhibited by Crewe-Read amidst

cultural differences between the British colonists and Owa Kingdom. Chief Igbooba and subordinates struggles to find a way of preserving their values and this led to calamities. The same misfortune occurred in Emeka Nwabueze's *Echoes of Madness* when Obiora manipulated by his Afro-American wife, defies brotherliness of African philosophy in their bid to intimidate Igbo priorities.

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