

**PLURALISM AS A PATHWAY FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN
NIGERIA: OLA ROTIMI'S PERSPECTIVE IN *HOPES OF THE LIVING DEAD*.**

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Abstract

Pluralism is a set of intentions and a practice that seeks to institutionalize the recognition of difference and respect for diversity as civic culture. In Nigeria, manifold ethnicity, religious differences, diverse political affiliations, multiple indigenous languages and dialects are the core characteristics of the country. Over the years, these differences have resulted to different forms of violent conflicts and terrorism. The resultant effects are in most cases defined in the area of destruction of lives and properties which is described as 'development in reverse'. The question is "Does diversity work against development? How can a plural state progress on the part of development?" Using Ola Rotimi's *Hopes of the Living Dead* as a benchmark, recognition of diversity itself as a precursor to pluralism can serve as a pathway and create a common ground for sustainable development. This investigation highlights the concept of pluralism and diversity and adopts development theories for data analyses. The study concludes that politics and policies of inclusion, inter-ethnic accommodation and inclusive institutions can promote a sense of belonging, loyalty and peace in the country. It also sees connection as a link to different creative views and self-sufficiency essential for sustainable development.

Keywords: Diversity, Pluralism, Development, Connection, Violent Conflict.

Introduction

According to scientific enquiry, the human body is made up of cells, organs and systems. The five sense organs of smell, hearing, touch, sight and taste that are made up of billions of specialized cells help to protect our body. The human respiratory, reproductive, digestive, excretory and nervous systems are made up of trillions of cells that are coordinated by the brain to make our lives possible (Connecting Human Biology & Health Choices). Malfunctioning of any of these organs or systems makes life difficult for any living being. This means that every living cell in the body plays crucial roles in the operation of the system. The roles of the cells, organs and systems and its recognition call for pluralism. Like the human body, human society is made up of different cultures, ethnicity, religions, languages and race. This is due to conquests, colonization, and immigration or otherwise. Peaceful coexistence of these societies over the years has been a challenge; because many have been discriminated against, killed, maimed and displaced from their homes due to violence conflict. For instance, the cost and

implication of Rwanda genocide of 1998 cannot be measured in both human and capital lost in the history of that nation state. In the same vain, difference in culture, ethnicity and religion has been responsible for multiple ethnic and religious upheavals in many nations and continents, particularly in Africa. Canada, one of the world most multicultural nation states takes advantage of the positive application of their multiculturalism resulting to it being, not only a successful country, but also the most peaceful and prosperous nation to live in (John McNee vii). It maybe as a result of the country's pluralist nature that the Global Centre of pluralism is located in that renowned diverse country. The Global Centre for Pluralism defines the concept as "a set of intentions and practices that seek to institutionalize recognition of difference and respect for diversity as civic culture." While diversity does not equate with pluralism, recognition of diversity is a necessary forerunner to pluralism. Although there are many forms of diversity, this paper focuses on differences as contained in *Ola Rotimi's Hopes of the Living Dead*.

The success of unity in diversity is the yearning of many nations state. United States of America is one of such successful country which is made up of fifty states that consist of every culture and languages in existence. African, Chinese, Indian, Hispanic, Jewish and British all find their unity and coexistence worthwhile. Americans capitalize on their pluralism to source for exceptional innovative talents to dominate the world scientifically, technologically and otherwise. That does not mean that pluralism does not have its own challenges; countries that are successful in its adoption are not immuned to problems that come with multiculturalism and diversity. The credibility of pluralism as a political theory depends on the major political force or social interest pushing for constitutional changes and the structure of political power (Paul Hirst 39). Is it possible for Nigeria to forge its own parts in adopting pluralism? How would pluralism fit into the country's multicultural values? What are the implications of pluralism in relation to violent conflicts in the country, and the place of arts in promoting pluralism? Against this backdrop, this paper investigates how well Ola Rotimi's *Hopes of The Living Dead* presents a representation of Nigeria as a diverse country, promoting pluralism desirous of recognizing diversity, and promotes a sense of belonging and loyalty among the people which is crucial for sustainable development. Like diversity in human body that makes it complex in functionality, peaceful coexistence of various ethnic, cultural and religious group is implicated if pluralism is adopted.

Development itself is a multi-dimensional concept that defies unified definition not only from development experts, economists but also from academic intellectuals. According to Dandaura, development can be viewed from two key perspectives; liberal capitalist perspective and human development perspective. From the capitalist school of thought, he defines development from purely economic perception of "increased per capita income and Gross National Product (GNP) (2)". From human development perception he asserts that development:

Is a complex social process that is dependent on man's effort to understand and make total control of his environment. This environment includes economic, social, political and cultural realities which man finds himself. This view conceives the improvement of general living condition, dignity and intellectual advancement of man as crucial to any meaningful development. (Dandaura 2-3).

These definitions show that development is all encompassing which includes not only economic wellbeing but also political freedom and stability, equality and freedom to determine one's own future, choices and acquisition of needed skills for its attainment. It is also linked to enhance quality of life, equity and justice, as it takes into consideration the wellbeing, growth and advancement of individuals within the society

Theoretical Justifications

Development theories are conglomeration of theories about how desirable changes in a society can be best achieved. Such theories draw on varieties of several scientific discipline and approaches. The scope of this research only applies dependency and human development approaches.

Dependency Theory: This development theory rejects modernization theory because of its exploitative nature. Dependency theory analyzes development and underdevelopment in the context of the international capitalist system, which is contained in the work of Karl Marx. Advocates of this theory contends that poverty in developing nations is as a result of their weak standing in the international division of labor; because of the economic, political and social dominance of the developed countries. This exploitation of the underdeveloped countries or societies enriched the advanced countries while the underdeveloped ones remain poor. This theory was developed in 1950s. Dependency theory share many points with Rosa Luxembour's and V I Lenin's Marxist and Neo-Marxist ideas. Dependency theorists held that for under developed nations to develop, they must break ties with developed nations and pursue internal growth. In application to this study, the leprosy patients in Port Harcourt General Hospital realize that their dependency on the management of the hospital for food and other basic necessities will not provide avenue for their self-sustenance and independent, but prefer Infectious Diseases Hospital (IDH) at Uzuakoli and break ties with the management of the hospital.

Human Development Theory: Human development theory stipulates that improved technology leads to greater productivity. Employees are expected to acquire the needed skills to be able to use technologies through formal education. This is what the United Nations Development Programs describe as the formation of human capabilities; such as improved health, knowledge, skills and the people's application of their acquired capabilities for leisure and productive purpose; or being active in cultural, social and political affairs (UNDP 1990). This theory lays emphasis on improved educational system in order to enhance greater productivity as propounded by one of its major advocates Amartya Sen. This theory undermines dependency theory because of its

exploitative nature. By its application in the play, the lepers decide to use their individual abilities, gift and skills to enable them to be independent from the hospital authority by relocating to Infectious Diseases Hospital (IDH) at Uzuakoli.

Synopsis of *Hopes of the Living Dead*

The Scottish scientist, Doctor Fergusson suspends his experiment of cure for leprosy at Port' Harcourt General Hospital. The hospital management also suspends the treatment of the leprosy patients that occupy the hospital Ward G and H. Some of the leprosy patients refuse to eat because of the suspension of their treatments. The hospital also plans to eject the lepers from the Wards. The lepers' refusal to be ejected into the bush and the inclusion of police to force the patients from their hospital wards is the source of the conflict. The lepers who come from different ethnic groups, religion, regions with different educational background start to argue about the position of sleeping mats, bed spaces, and who to occupy the space of the patient that disappears from the ward. Some leprosy patients also discriminate other patients; base on the types of leprosy, while others disappear from the ward for begging against the hospital law since the illness is transmissible. The police with the permission of the hospital management, tries to force the leprosy patients out of their ward without success, as a result a leper is shot. The hospital authority and the police demand that the leper select a leader among themselves to represent them for possible peaceful dialogue and agreement. The lepers select Ikoli Harcourt White to represent them. The authority of the Port' Harcourt General Hospital under the headship of Senior Medical Officer (SMO) and Superintendent of police in one hand and the leprosy patients under the leadership of Ikoli Harcourt White on another. The hospital management and the police seeks to bribe Ikoli Harcourt White with a house of his own in his village and a life gratuity if only he will agree for lepers to be sent away without any benefits. Ikoli Harcourt White refuses the offer, and insists that a specialist hospital should instead be provided for the leprosy patients. Despite differences in opinions, statues, and class the hospital management and the leprosy patients reach agreement and Infectious Diseases Hospital (IDH), specifically for the lepers is provided at Uzuakoli.

Pluralism in Nigeria and *Hopes of The Living Dead*

Like the curious and diverse family of lepers in the Happening 1 of *Hopes of The Living Dead* also known as *The Play of Struggle*, every plural society is diverse in its own way, and alarming number of diverse societies are also unhappy. This is because basic social co-existence and social cooperation, is compromised by animosity, mistrust, intolerance and even violent conflict directed against groups that represent an Other; the leprosy patients and the regular patients or residents of Port' Harcourt. This is defined and visible in ethnic, racial, religious group. The class difference in *The Hopes of The Living Dead* is between the residents of Port' Harcourt and the Inmates of Ward G and H; who are suffering from leprosy. Despite being the custodians of social order, government in plural societies may privilege one ethnic or religious group more than the other even in

democratic states. It may advance the interests of particular groups at the expense of others in ways that jeopardize the formal equality of citizens, inclusive cooperation necessary for sustainable development. The playwright desires an inclusive economic policy that would reduce income gap between the 'haves' and the 'haves not' to encourage pluralism and a more sustainable model of federalism. Emphasizing on the level of inequality between the inmate in one hand, and the regular 'patients' the 'public' in another; the Senior Medical Officer (SMO) of Port 'Harcourt General Hospital, said:

SMO: Have you tried to think for a second, that while your festivity lasts, there might be other patients- I mean *regular* patients, who were being disturbed?

EDITOR: those 'regular' patients, as you call them, sir – they receive regular visitors. Daily wives visit them, bring food; husband stop by, bring fruits. Friends cheer them; children hug them. We are well you know?

SMO: that's not reason why your pleasures should disturb their peace when they need it.

NWEKE: Do they complain, sir?

SMO: Do they complain? Ha! Do they complain! Well, let me tell you, fellows: the whole land complains (13)

This class difference between the lepers and the residents undermine the right of the patients in Ward G and H whose family members are restricted from visiting them due to the nature of their illness, but are not allowed having a moment of merriment by singing on their own. The government easily gives in to the demand of the residents since they are aware that leprosy is a contagious disease. To fast-track their demand, they call the Scottish scientist insulting names such as the mad Scotsman. The senior medical officer cautions the inmates:

SMO: Rubbish, yes! If what we'll be getting from you is ingratitude and impertinence. From the public, we get disgust and reproach. Daily. It all means that our experiment with you is all rubbish. You know what the public calls the Doctor, don't you? The mad Scotsman (13-14)

This deep inequality has in part fuel militancy in Niger Delta region of Nigeria as well as Boko Haram insurgency in the Northeastern part of the country. Despite Nigeria's federal structure aimed at promoting pluralism, inequality among the federating unit is increasingly visible especially in recent decades. Although, the current 1999 Constitution as Amended tends to promote pluralism and uphold a sense of belonging and loyalty in the federation through 'federal character', inequality has been a constant challenge that has resulted to violence conflict and other factors that cause sustainable development impediments. While the income of the rich continues to increase, the number of unemployed youths and the rate of poverty multiply, thus hindering sustainable development. It is pertinent to note in the play that; inequality is created as a result of

'leprosy', an infectious disease. In the same vein, religious bigotry, ethnic prejudice, corruption, and discrimination are as transmissible as 'leprosy'. In order to protect its individual interest; various ethnic groups' agitation for dominance has led to:

.. the emergence and growth of non-state armed groups... These groups include: The Oodua People's Congress (OPC) (a pro-Yoruba organization); Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People and Ijaw youth groups in the Niger Delta (MEND); the Arewa People's Congress (a pro- Hausa-Fulani organization); and Boko Haram (the radical Islamist sect from northeastern Nigeria (Daniel E. Agbiboa 3)

The result of these armed ethnic affiliations is: political tension, communal violence, unstable economy, decaying social infrastructure, herdsmen terrorism and increasing linkages with an enthronement of ethno-religious battles and persistent corruption. *Hopes of The Living Dead* projects that except this *leprosy* are removed from the society, no meaningful development can be achieved and sustained. Most of the patients are educated and reputable men and women in their own right. According to Court Clark, one of the patients while revisiting the biography of some inmates he states:

CC:...Sister Hannah here for instance, comes from an important family in Owerri. Daughter of a Chief. She was a teacher, trained in a Convent and all. Taught for –what, five years. (*Hannah doesn't respond*) Then came her but. Mallam: that Mallam you see sitting over there, was a paymaster at the Native Administration in Kano for many years. Then his own *but* came to be. (*Pointing to Catechist*) we call him Catechist. It is true.

CAT: 1917 to 1925. Before then, Chief Interpreter: Royal Niger Company. Get my record straight, Mister.

CC: Anyway- he too got his own *but*. So did he.... (*Pointing to Editor*) He was subeditor for the Lagos Spectator. I retired as a Court Clerk in Yola. Returned home to be a Letter –Writer in my town. Then I had my own but. Oh, of course, there are farmers, fishermen, even beggars among us... (11-13)

The play of struggle is questioning the deteriorating nature of Nigeria educational system. If the lepers whose fingers and toes are cut off due to the nature of their ailment can write letter that could move the government into action to solve their collective problem, why is Nigeria not able to reduce the level of illiteracy? Improvement in the country's educational system would create an avenue for innovative thinking, research and experimentation that are indispensable for development. Instead, the country continues to fall short of The United Nation's Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) recommendation of 26 per cent budgetary benchmark to enable nations adequately cater for rising education demands. Out of the N8.6 trillion budget estimates for 2018, only 7%, (N605.8 billion) was allotted for education sector (*The Business Post*). It is a known fact that development cannot be attained and sustained without a working educational system. That is the reason Elisabeth King opines that:

The current development focuses on empowerment...expansion of the capacity of individuals to make choices. The measure most commonly

associated with this form of development is the Human Development Index, rating the quality of life in different countries with measures of life expectancy, *education* and per capita income (4)

A closer examination of the situation in the male Ward is the choir section and prayer by Mallam without any conflict. In plural societies, the relationship between a state and religion is particularly significant if it is a multi-religious society. Apart from theological states; such as Saudi Arabia (where the state and religion are unified) and states that refuse to recognize religion (such as the former Soviet Union) Nigeria is among the countries that are democratic within the two extremes where citizens avow to different faith. Such religious difference is not the root of apprehension within the play. Ola Rotimi sets out to correct the societal ills that often result into religious conflict in Nigeria that challenge the country's developmental targets.

Agbibo discourses that diversity of religion in Nigeria has periodically provoked tensions between the regions and within communities, especially since the rise of more fundamentalist strains of Islam during the 1980s and in recent decades (1). The contention that has claimed more lives and destruction of properties, public infrastructure and disregard for order. According to United States Institute of Peace: Special Report on Religion and Conflict in Nigeria 'Nigeria is not only the largest half Muslim, half Christian country, but by far also ranked as the most religious (John Paden: 5). This religious attachment is often used not as a means of creating inclusive environment and peaceful coexistence which the different faiths profess to preach, but as tool for violence, chaos and discrimination. Regarding Southern Kaduna massacre in 2017, Binniyat L, et' al reported that:

"In Chaiwai, Chieftdom, Karu, LGA, where five villages were sacked and 45 people killed in November, the survivors said the gunmen were chanting *Allahu Akbar Allahu Akbar*. They shot and killed pigs in the villages, also stole goats and grains and burnt the churches and houses there (*Vanguard Newspaper: January 2017*)

In the play, Mallam is on a sheepskin praying while at the same time; Ikoli Harcourt Whyte is leading a choir practice for other inmates. At the end of Mallam's prayer and choir session, other inmates beg Mallam to sing for the whole house. Though Mallam could not sing at this time because of malaria, from their conversation it has been his usual practice to sing for the inmates after his prayer. The playwright is asking the pertinent question that, if patients that are physically challenged with different religious believe can coexist peacefully, what about those without such limitations. Does Nigeria's religious diversity promote tolerance or intolerance?

While the inmates tolerate their individual religious background; they face the challenges such as division, diverse ideas and sects which undermine respect for diversity and inclusion. The inmates are not immuned to these shortcomings because no plural society

is perfect, but different views create an avenue for different choices. Base on their background, the inmates come from various ethnic groups in Nigeria. Hannah and Nweke are Igbos. Mallam and Editor come from the Northern part of the country; possibly speak Hausa/Fulani. There are Isan, Yoruba, Ibibio, Calabar and Okirika etc. The complex makeups of the inmates represent the complex nature of Nigeria as a plural state. With the help of the leadership skills of Ikoli Harcourt Whyte, the lepers are able to find a common ground that unites them to reach their aspiration through individual contribution. In his book, *Common Ground* (2014), Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau asserted that Canada's great diversity has resulted in harmony and development...He argues that "[w]e have always built prosperity by coming together, learning from each other's distinct perspectives, but moving beyond those differences to find common ground. This is how we have worked toward a just and prosperous country" (King 8).

While the union is not perfect, inmates face in-house challenges such as discrimination by comparing the severity of each type of leprosies (the skin types and the one that do cut toes and fingers and nose). Alibo (an Okirika inmate) drag with Jimoh (a Yoruba inmate) over who is to use Catechist's bed, Jimoh refuses to use Alibo's mat (even though he has none) because he believes that his own type of leprosy is different. Speaking via Court Clerks interpretation:

CC:...Alibo's leprosy is the worst kind- the kind that rots the fingers, toes, nose, and lips. But his own? The skin type. The nice one... (26)

Hannah's intervention and decisive action in depriving the two combatants from using the bed at that time resolves the chaos within the Ward. In the same vein, Court Clerk and Editor could not agree on how the letter to the authority should be written. While Editor insists on the conservative way of writing, Court Clerk is in support of formal petition; but he has no finger to pen down his thought. Though the disagreement is resolved by Ikoli Harcourt Whyte, a team consisting of Nweke (inmate with finger) and Court Clark (inmate without finger) are able to write a formal petition; the ability to forge ahead is of utmost important to peaceful coexistence while pushing for sustainable development goals. It is as a result of teamwork and pressing toward progress that John McNee, Secretary General, Global Centre for Pluralism concluded that: "There is no one-size-fits-all approach to pluralism. History matters. Every country must forge its own path, rooted in its own aspirations and stating where it stands" (vii). Nigeria must define its own aspirations, goals, values without ethnic, religious, political, class and regional barrier if development must be achieved and sustained.

Diversity and Connection for Sustainable Development in Nigeria

Pluralism calls for acceptance and respect for diversity. Accepting one another mean creating a connection. But connection itself does not necessarily mean to eliminate our differences or to erase our distinction; neither does it mean to reach agreement; but to learn from each other and through our individual innovative ideas (Aga Khan). This is

because every individual has a distinctive creative talent to contribute to societal desires for sustainable development in a diverse society. Pluralism indicators values diversity, which does not weaken society but instead strengthen it; through tolerance, openness and understanding toward others to push for sustainable goals. The return of Catechist with a couple and a child give credence to this assertion in the play. Corpul, who is a retired military Corporal, was part of Lord Fredrick Lugard's West Africa Frontier Force. He fought in Kontagora in 1901, Bauchi, Borno in 1902, and after his engagement at Kano and Sokoto in 1903, he was promoted to the rank of a military Corporal with symbolic 'one-rope' before he is affected with leprosy and took up a new occupation as a beggar. His connection with Catechist brings him, his wife and their kid to the Ward G. because he is not educated and he is Tiv by tribe, he first entertains fear that he and his household may not be welcomed. Speaking to his friend Catechist he states:

MAN: (rising nervously) if we are not wanted here, we shall depart please

CAT: Be patient, let me ask him (*Addressing Harcourt Whyte*) They are three...he wants to know if they are to stay with us. Corpul. We call him Corpul. He is Tiv. We met in Kafanchan

HW: Let them stay... (*Approaches Man, places a reassuring arm on his shoulder*) Hannah...

The Man (Corpul) is formally accepted to the Ward despite the discontinuation of medical treatment and possible eviction of inmates by the hospital authority. The man (Corpul) may at first seem not to be able to contribute anything to the progress of the lepers, but in *Happening V*, he is the 'Commander in Chief of lepers at arm'. His military experience and tactic is put into use in an engagement with an invading armed state police. Although the commander is shot and wounded, the lepers are victorious in the 'war' against the 'invaders'. Pluralism accepts recognition of others and accepts them no matter where they come from, their tribe, language and experiences. At the official opening of the Global Centre for Pluralism, May 16 2017, His Highness the Aga Khan, Board Chair, Global Centre for Pluralism concluded that "Diversity is not a reason to put up walls, but rather to open windows. It is not a burden; it is a blessing". If our doors are open, we create a connection with others who can use their creative ideas for the development of the society. That is the reason Elisabeth King argues that:

many wealthy, democratic countries function and grow economically very well with diversity. The 2004 Human Development Report makes a similar argument, praising the value of the "dynamics and creativity arising from the interactions of different cultural groups." The report references a study showing that 11 of the top 15 high-technology metropolitan areas in the United States are also those with the highest overall diversity, inferring that diversity fosters creativity and innovation. It also points to the economic benefits of migration wherein recipient countries increase diversity in the hopes of economic gain. (9)

The presence of Corpul in the Ward and his innovative military expertise is of utmost benefit to the patients, and to the realization of their aspiration. Development cannot be achieved and sustained if people live in fear of possible attack and leaders cannot guarantee security of lives and properties. Nigeria's vast ethnic, linguistic, religious and regional diversity has been an abiding source of societal tensions and conflicts even to the point of being debated in foreign parliament. United Kingdom (UK) House of Lords debated the rising insecurity in Nigeria at the heels of the massacre of more than 100 persons in Plateau State which the perpetrators claimed was retaliation for the killing of 300 cows belonging to its members (Vanguard Newspaper). This kind of insecurity gives rise to development in 'revise' because it is counterproductive to development itself. A violence conflict in Nigeria is as a result of lack of recognition for diversity and commitment to pluralism.

Pluralism is not the fight for elimination of others, but the choices and actions we make that advance respect for diversity and foster inclusion. Editor describes this thus:

EDITOR:...we are not fighting the people. We are fighting *for* the people. We are fighting for the simple things which everybody wants. The strong or the sick; Fulani or Ijaw; man or woman; Yoruba or Ibibio; old or young; Hausa or Urhobo; rich or poor; Kanuri or Ibo. Everybody wants one thing in life. We all want to go to sleep at night in peace, and to wake up in the morning with trust that there will be food for the stomach...(58)

In Nigeria, ethnicity has allowed people to resort to violence and fight the people instead of fighting for them. These actions negate development policies that limit its benefits.

Recommendation and Conclusion

Diversity should not be seen as a means of violent conflict despite the country's past experience of wars and conflicts, but as an avenue to pursue a more prosperous and peaceful future for sustainable development. The world is becoming smaller than never before; this is as a result of innovations in science and technology making it easier for global sharing of ideas and creative abilities which can be found in our differences. Pluralism; which is the recognition, value and respect, tolerance, identifying with others, in a diverse culture, language, religion and ethnicity should be enthroned in Nigeria for sustainable development. Political tension, communal violence, herdsmen terrorism and increasing ethno-religious battles will only slow the country on the part to development. It is important at this stage in Nigeria to adopt politics and policies of inclusion, inter-ethnic accommodation and inclusive institutions which will promote a sense of belonging, loyalty and peace.

Unless interfaith relations are set right, sustainable development policies are not likely to succeed. When electing leaders for public offices, electorates should always push for courageous Harcourt Whyte-like leaders who would coordinate the affairs of the people despite their differences. Leaders should advance the course of pluralism and be more

active in political, religious, social, military, economic, and academic circles and live by it while pushing for youth engagement in leadership and development policies. More importantly, political leadership is critical to aiding interfaith collaboration and oppose even a more violent religious extremism that can jeopardise sustainable development mechanisms. Pluralism in Nigeria is the ‘heart’ to peaceful coexistence essential for sustainable development, and *The Hopes of the Living Dead* is the ‘stethoscope’

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