

SEARCHING FOR THE SOUL OF THE NATION IN HENRY BELL-GAM'S THE HIDDEN TREASURE AND AHMED YERIMA'S HARD GROUND, WHO DARES: ETHNICITY, POLITICS OR RELIGION?

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Abstract

From time immemorial, ethnicity, politics and religion have stood as archenemies to any supposedly progressive nation. This has given credence to Karl Marx's religious maxim. Ethnicity, politics and religion and their attendant misunderstandings and misapplications have been the subject of numerous academic and social discourses, yet, there is nothing concrete to report. The shape of national politics that once worked and the scholarly projections therein are progressively becoming non-operational and have subsequently transformed into contemporary ideological standpoints which on daily basis are struggling to remain afloat. There is the need to constantly engage the nation in academic postulations in order to curb what has kept the nation restless, pontificating in different intellectual round-tables without remarkable achievements. This paper reflects on the prism of searching for the soul of the nation as the only adequate mirror in concretely reflecting the society the way it is and proffering solutions. This paper anchors its analysis on Henry Bell-Gam's the Hidden Treasure and Ahmed Yerima's Hard Ground with the characters of Eze Omasi and Nimi on the centre of magnetism. Oscar Lewis' Culture of Poverty theory plays a significant role in this paper. The consideration shows how these playwrights interrogate and reflect the modern-day Nigerian society with her pockets of agitations, criminality, insurgencies, insurrections, political ineptitude thereof. The paper recommends that for the society to gear towards real development that will subdue the issue of criminalities, et al, ethnicity, religion and politics should be played with human face: sincerity, honesty and love.

Keywords: *Ethnicity, politics, religion, nation and poverty*

1. INTRODUCTION

Ethnicity has been considered to be the cause of the 1967-1970 civil war in Nigeria, elections which have been rigged and those who have failed can be blamed on ethnicity, the manipulation of census figures can only be understood from the ethnic dimension. (Sampson, 73). Every day, the Nigerian

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society having been defiled in copious dimensions, experiences, trepidations and endless threats from overflowing ravaging eccentricities within her four walls and this has brought the nation to a standstill in terms of development. Though one cannot say earnestly that the Nigerian society has once experienced a problem free dispensation, the early days, before and after the civil war was fairly accommodating, promising and even favourable in copious ramifications, bearing in mind that the nation showed prospects in her economy, education, infrastructural developmental concerns, and even politics. However, Nigeria within the last three decades has been dazed to the shackles of death, suffering, poverty, insecurity, unemployment, poor facilities and amenities, bribery, corruption, and a host of other social depravities. To even think worse is to say for sure that the numerous vices that have been facing Nigeria for a sustainable period of time appears to grow fattened every day just like a tree planted by the rivers of water. In a related interest however, while the enlisted problems appear so credible and true, adopting the lens of an eagle as well as some critical sensibilities will permeate one to think that the problems of Nigeria is not far from three basic embodiments which are; Religion, Politics and Ethnicity.

This position may hold so much ground sequel to the fact that more than one third of Nigerians are living below poverty line. In fact, according to Abdu Yusuf, report from the World Bank indicts Nigeria in 2005, stating that:

Nigeria is third country of the world with poverty after China and India. This was evidence in the study Undertaken by Zakari, which shows that 70 percent of people in Nigeria are living below poverty line; in which one third survive on less than US\$1 a day. (153).

With this genuine provision, the basic thought of an average Nigerian is just to survive and survive alone by any means necessary. Evidence of this fact has seen countless politicians, religious leaders, and even traditional leaders in Nigeria engage in fraudulent acts and malpractices in order to enrich themselves via their exalted and privilege positions. This ill practice has in even sense corrupted the masses as well, as even a commoner in the place of opportunity may not care to think twice if there is a chance to undo a person(s) just for casual gain by means of his mantle, regardless of how inconsequential it may appear.

The trim above ironical indicts all classes in Nigeria and without bias, however, to remain focus is to state that due to the high prevalence of poverty and its relative impacts upon the people the quest to survive have made many Nigerians through an unconscious spirit overturn the goodwill mandate of religion, politics and even culture upside-down, manipulating them selfishly to ultimately survive. And so, religion and politics is now falling apart, creating

more mayhem than good to the people. What good can one even expect when on a daily basis cheating, lying, deceit, scamming, stealing (armed robbery), kidnapping and bribery and corruption chokes the atmosphere of the society with an embryonic effect. Considering such an ailing trademark, the country's socio-economic and diplomatic standards are being weighed down to the dust. Backing this argument with a little bit of fact will automatically necessitate the reminder that Nigeria is highly rated in the international corruption log. As a matter of fact, Trading Economics in 2019 paints a seamless image of the situation through her submission:

Nigeria is the 146 least corrupt nation out of 180 countries, according to the 2019 corruption perceptions index reported by transparency international...The corruption perceptions index ranks countries and territories based on how corrupt their public sector is perceived to be. A country or territory's rank indicates its position relative to the other countries and territories in the index. (Nigeria Corruption Rank, 2020)

Additional data from the same source informs that since 2005 till date, Nigeria's corruption ranking fluctuates negatively on the high. Supportively, Nigeria's crime ranking is also summoning, thus, a source in 2019 opines that:

The current U.S Department of State Travel Advisory at the date of this report's publication assesses Nigeria at level 3, indicating travelers should reconsider travel to the country due to crime, terrorism, civic unrest, kidnapping, and piracy. (Nigeria 2020 Crime & Safety Report: Abuja, 2020)

This is quite a fact, nevertheless, in installing further clarity, the source explains the nation's crime threats, hence; it is believed there is serious risk of crime in Lagos. Crime is prevalent throughout Nigeria. Most crime directed toward U.S travelers and private-sector entities in southern Nigeria seeks financial gain. U.S visitors and residents have been victims of a wide range of violent crime, including armed robbery, assault, burglary, carjacking, rape, kidnapping, and extortion. The mostly commonly reported crimes are armed robbery, kidnap for ransom, and fraud. As crude as this information appears, this datum is a fact and a painful one at that. And as such, instigate the wonder; have the people lived their lives quite without the use of their conscience? Or have they completely thrown it away? Surprisingly, the response "Yes" is pretty much the answer to these questions. Prince Ololube is perhaps pricked by this throbbing veracity to have opined that:

Human needs are insatiable, and as they go about them matters a lot. The major issue is the immaturity on the way it is handled: greediness, selfishness, the luxurious lifestyle and their thinking, which has always been,

'what is in there for me? Will it benefit me? How satisfying will I be? (Ololube, 663)

Devoid of recourse, the latter's observation is certainly a loud trend perceptible in all facets of the society not excluding the church and other religious bodies and even the ivory tower. Whoever decides to argue otherwise should first explain to the world why politicians/public office holders in the country take delight in amassing trillions of naira and millions of dollars to the direction of their private bank accounts whereas the faces of those they represent looms at them in hunger, pain and frustration. This is obviously not a myth but fact hence there are related instances to show. Most recent amongst them is the convicting of former governor of Abia State but now senator Orji Uzo Kalu. According to *Premium Times* in December 2019, Court sentences Orji Kalu to 12 years in prison for fraud. Although Orji Kalu is one of the few that have been made to face the law for their crimes, many like him are still out there producing greater impairment to the state and the people therein. With the amount of funds involve, Orji's case seems threatening, nevertheless, a more frightening case was witnessed many years ago with late Sani Abacha's loot. Long dead over 20 years now, late Sani's loot is yet a fresh meal for discussion anytime, any-day and anywhere. Thus, *Vanguard* as paraphrased, states although he is no more, General Sani Abacha has been humorously described as one of the ancestors of Nigeria who has been donating money generously to successive governments from the land of the dead as his loot was outrageous. Many believe that his regime encouraged corruption by stashing away illicit funds in foreign bank accounts. (Abacha Loot: How much did the late Head of State steal?, 2020)

While this ugly looking situation prevalent in the political system is yet to be stomached or even shouldered for resolution, religious leaders especially those in the church shows smidgeons that puts them in the same gutters as the stinking reputation of politicians. Theirs' can even be considered worse owing to the fact that their tools for operation involves lying, misleading, cheating and finally larceny from the throng of followers who believes so greatly in them. Wretched and needy, they come in their multitude yet, through ill means, these poor congregation members are extorted heavily; bent on emotions but against their actual will, the people react in accordance to the preset tune of their beloved bishops and reverends. Such is an untainted situation of pleasure without conscience as the people who come needy are nonetheless sapped of the bantam, they have through the process of their lords yet, they remain loyal and interminably expectant. Charged towards material gains and power, these religious dominos have been coerced to use black magic to command huge crowd and for performing mesmerizing

miracles, while others stage-manage their programs and miracles alike to the delight of their followers. In 2020, one of such stage-managed miracles eventually went bad. The *guardianng* bears this news with the headline “End of road for woman used by ‘pastors’ to perform fake miracles”. Explaining how the IGP Intelligence Team arrested the said woman, the local news source clarifies;

A 44-year old woman, Mrs. Bose Olasukanmi who was used by several fraudulent pastors to perform fake miracles has been arrested by operatives of the Inspector General of Police Intelligence Response Team (IRT) in Lagos after months of trail on her by the undercover operatives... When the bubble burst, the suspect Olasukanmi went into hiding while the fraudulent pastors quickly made a video of how and when they were performing the fake miracle which looked real to the unsuspecting congregation as watched her being healed by the pastors. (End of road for woman used by ‘pastors’ to perform fake miracles. 2020)

Speaking of black magic, a local news blog named *GalantMedia.ng*, in 2020 bears one of such saga involving a fraudulent pastor. Synopsized with the phrase; “Early hours of yesterday being 15 of June 2020, a renowned pastor, Rev. Paul Abam who is the CEO of Word Best Prophetic Ministry in Ugep, was caught in his hometown Itigidi in Abi Local Government Area of Cross River State using charm”, the source brightens the air with details:

It was gathered by an eye witness which name is withheld that the pastor who is known for miraculous healings, prophecy and seeing vision was caught while he was trying to bury charm in his hometown. He was paraded around the community before being handed over to police for the law to take its full course. The pastor had deceived his cousin that someone planted charm somewhere in his land. Thereafter, he told him to pay some amount of money so that he could help him get the charm out of the land. Unknowing to the pastor, someone watched him as he went to plant the charm himself. (Marcus, 2020)

The church and religion in general is obviously not the only fraudulent institution in the country, fraud is everywhere including the least expected place. Nevertheless, an ironic truth is that religion should be first indicted, due to its high and respected placement in the subconscious of the human mind.

To many, religion ordinarily denote the belief in supernatural beings, and as a matter of fact, these supernatural entities have since time immemorial serviced mankind as guide and watchdog towards morality. But to think of it in this time and age, there are so much anomalies associated with the practice and this is so amongst individual religions. While religion is supposed to father ethics and dish out morals to mankind, with what is seen on the earth surface,

it is glaring that the result in likeness to the mandate of religion appears to be a failed attempt. After all, there have been religious wars fought all over the globe through different times. The Nigerian society even of late is currently going through a cold and open religious war or you can as well call it religious crisis. The surrounding template here is defending a religious order even if it means blood staining the hands, instead of putting the society and its relative peace first and foremost. No wonder, Carl Max strongly opined that "religion is the opium of the masses". Max's position further explains the reasons many Nigerians often engage in unnecessary domestic politics; juxtaposing merit for favoritisms, supporting nepotism and all sorts of prejudice display all because of religious affiliation. This idea has even affected the nation's politics thus, even though the Nigerian constitution states according to Momoh Yesufu (2). "That the position of law is that religious belief is not to influence any public or governmental decisions", the Nigerian populace who are considerably very religious in nature have not only paid deaf ears to that constitutional stipulation but are in the verge of wrecking its even existence. This further explains why the latter coincides with Kukah and Usman submission that; "However, interaction within Nigeria within religious groups of Islamic faith and Christian faith indeed show evidence of one aggressive conversion into political association and religious practice". (Qtd in Yesufu, 3)

With the above, there may be no contention to the bearing of religion upon Nigerian politics, in fact, the two ideas now move like twin brothers. After all, it has been heavily observed that people's choice for political office contenders is usually factorized by their political affiliations as well as those of the contestants. Hence, competence and merit is overlooked and undermined just to grant auspicious treatments for religious reasons even when the plausibility of incompetence flower in the fore heads of such ill contestants. The above is true and basic but to consider politics discretely is to admit earnestly that the concept has for long suffered terribly from the hands of Nigerians, and that may be a big lead to some of the problems facing Nigeria today. Poised with resembling interest, Anikpo expresses arrant displeasure about the matter by stating that:

The socio-economic and political realities of Nigeria since independence till date have consistently generated mass poverty, disease, ignorance and insecurity. The irony however is that the country has been blessed with abundant revenue generating resources and a large population with highly skilled and resourceful members. Development and underdevelopment theorists had always attributed this anomaly of poverty amidst plenty to both internal and external sources. The internal source is generally known to derive from poor leadership. Poor leadership explains why

after 50 years of independence, Nigeria still does not have a government and the Nigerian state is believed by many to have failed. Successions of extremely corrupt civilian and military governments dominated by greedy and insensitive politicians and militicians have left the country still grappling with colonial challenges. (5)

Politics is a worldwide phenomenon that essentially involves policy making and the governmental procedure of fluctuating high public office holders. Its existence inclusively accommodates every nation of the world however, appears to be run differently according to the culture, doctrines and constitution of individual nations. Pointy however is that the concept in its envisioned sense is supposed to be a fine and clinical preoccupation that levels the diplomacy of winning reputable public offices so as to gain through public opinion the privilege of contributing immensely to social wellness. Nevertheless, only a few nations who practice it in fairness proves so since the mandate have been terribly altered by a bulky number of world nations, especially amongst the continents of Africa and Asia. The U.S.A, Germany, Japan, Britain, France etc. are paradigm nations who practices a mature, fair, democratic and a recommended kind of politics while Nigeria amongst more than a hundred nations in similar likeness is sagaciously otherwise. Outwardly scolding the situation, Fyneyface poured out his heart in collaboration thus:

Democracy which is the government of the people, by the people and for the people has indeed eluded most of the African societies due to the leadership question. The inability to give good governance and purposeful leadership has been a running problem among the political class in Africa. Over the years while the citizenry criticizes the political class for their failure to render the dividends of democracy through electronic and print media, the corrupt and irredeemable amongst them see their election (selection) into the various offices as their chance to loot from national treasury. (214)

Marrying this creed of politics practiced in Nigeria where there is enormous foul play, massive embezzlement of public funds fueled by extreme greed. A bulk of what they do throughout their tenure is scheming and plotting to loot public funds meant for the development of the society. Bell-Gam's *The Hidden Treasure* captures one good example of such antics as manned by Deputy Eze Omasi.

Deputy Eze Omasi: See my people, this method is simple. I will collect the money, give it to you to go and deliver to Eze Kohia. You will in turn divert the money to my wife who will be waiting anxiously for it. Don't forget o. you will come back to us, and in the presence of the people, announce our Eze's appreciation on receiving the money. Can you do it? You have to be fast about

it, it is a game of chance. The people will soon be here. Can you really act this role? (36)

In addition to greed, god-fatherism, nepotism and tribalism, unhealthy sentiments based on religious grounds or some other reasons etcetera are largely the imprints of Nigeria's politics. And in effect, what else can one expect, except for slippery results. This shaggy attitude as a matter of fact, looks to have secured a very consequential impact upon the Nigerian society. This trend is even sonorously linked to the psychic order of the people; hence, their thinking have been conditioned overtime to see things from a very narrow and ill perspective. In this very case, an average Nigerian is in any place, time or condition ready to tell anyone who cares to listen that his main interest should he gain the break to dive into politics is to enrich himself. And so, many of those who are privilege to have reach that landmark make little mistake thus, ensure that they accrue plenteous wealth for themselves and their generations yet unborn, meanwhile, those that they are meant to serve via their mandate continue to wallow in poverty. Of course, what can one expect considering such a doomful circumstance other than rebellion of all sorts. It is widely propagated that "a hungry man is an angry man" hence, a hungry, deprived, and abandoned Nigerian considering his hopeless seeming situation may have little choice but to take to arms. The leadings will as expected result to social deviances such as; militancy, insurgency, armed robbery, kidnapping, domestic theft, bribery, corruption, cheating etc.

The aforementioned "criminalistics" endeavors are without doubt responsible buildups to the longitudinal decadence faced by the nation for a significant time frame; yet, little remorse is attached to this malady of national concern. And despite the dragging and degenerating effects the nation suffers on account of this negative colorations, only a diminutive effort with a rather inconsequential impact is put in to overturn this fore-mark, instead, much intensity is mounted to increase its rampaging on the social wellness of the people. And to even think worse, is to add snappishly that another leading mark to this malaise condition is the trappings created by ethnicity. As in line with religion and politics, instead of counter effects, ethnicity is in equal sense a barricade to national development as far as Nigeria is concern.

To define ethnicity is to quickly refer "the common characteristics of a group of people". Connotatively, drawing from the definition above, the impression maintains a harmonious coexistence of a group of people. And so, while the concept is supposed to support unity and development since it has its root in culture and civilization, the leadings in Nigeria tells amiss. This is factual because, observing some critical sensibilities is to note that as nepotism, favoritism, and partiality submit to denote like meanings, due to the

frivolousness and foulness surrounding the phenomenon, ethnicity has gradually become a synonym as well. Just as what is readily obtainable when one considers religion and politics in Nigeria, people are in most times favored unduly due to their ethnic origin and so to claim brotherhood and favorable courtesy, Nigerians are not only in the practice of connecting with persons from like ethnic nationalities, but are also in the habit of claiming false origin. Thus, it is noteworthy to admit that, this cruel practice which supports bias, sentiments and "discriminable" preference other than merit has since become a general culture for Nigerians. And in related interest, it is also of essence to relay that these attitudes of ethnicity alongside its brotherly embodiments (Politics and Religion) are responsible factors to the de-developmental ravaging loopholes all over Nigeria today. This unlikeliest has for decades drilled the nation, drifting it from its glorious goals thus, the center can no longer hold and as such; the country and the people therein are pushed to a dead end as things fall apart.

The premise above in its entirety suggests nothing but the delinquent headlines associated with the Nigerian society for a sustainable period now. And while it is yet a problem, it is imperative to maintain that it has drawn multiple attentions both locally and internationally. In the artistic realm, despite the fact that numerous researchers have written several books, journals and articles just to ease the qualms, literary dramatists have also articulated their thoughts by means of drama. Their efforts are as expected, attempts to find a way out of this situational malady. Therefore, their styling of representing life seeming events, situations or circumstances with a creative plot crafting that inspires great emotional outburst in the minds of their processing audience(s) is highly recommended. Consequently, this paper shall rely on two play texts which are stiffly germane to the context of this discourse. They are masterpieces with enjoyable artistic ingenuity, bearing issues of topical nature thus, becomes readily interesting for the floating of this paper.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

To begin any discussions here is to fore mostly make provision for a conceptual definition. This need is in the interest of explaining reoccurring terms which are also considered operational terms. Thus, as highlighted in the body of the abstract, the following terms are to be duly considered; ethnicity, politics, religion, nation and poverty.

Ethnicity: explains the common characteristics of a group of people. Expressed occasionally as ethnic group, this sought of group elucidates a communal coexistence of a people sharing common creed in various aspects of life. Such aspects include; religion, belief, tradition, food, language, fashion

etc. In a nutshell, an ethnic group exist in a sense of culture, thus, the people therein express multiple commonalities in their technology of living.

Politics: explains a methodology and activities associated with running a government, an organization or a movement. In further light, it conjures the maneuvers and diplomacy between people as it involves power, influence or conflict. In strict context however, the concept is much nearer to the sense of the affairs of statesmen/stateswomen in gaining high governmental positions as well as how they operate therein in performing their civic mandates as well as maintaining and improving their portfolios.

Religion: in strict sense, the concept explains the belief in and worship of a supernatural being controlling several powers. It further describes a particular system of faith and worship. It is operated with stiff devotion to a given principle of faith and conscientiousness to a supreme being.

Nation: this complex term explains a historically constituted, stable community of people formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life and psychological makeup manifested in a common culture. In further sense, the term describes a sovereign state accommodating a group of people sharing aspects of language, culture and/or ethnicity.

Poverty: this term labels the quality or state of being poor or indigent; want or scarcity of means of subsistence; indigence; need. This critical state of being explicates any deficiency of elements or resources that are critical to living i.e., the lacking of basic human resources.

2.1 Literary Appraisal

The amalgamation of Nigeria by Britain in 1914 began the journey of a multi-numbered coexistence of people stemming from different ethnic nations, religions and cultural geographies. It is given that this novel expedition saw a greener light on 1st October 1960 as the then juvenile nation gained independence from her British colony. The plot thus, went smoothly especially in the context of the nation's citizens and their relative aspiration. They were eager to see a developing state having attained sovereignty and so, they sought to unite probably till God knows when. However, the 1970 civil war (Biafra war) nightmare suddenly put a knife to the relative peace the people enjoyed before. Since then, it is on record that things have gone from bad to worse; the peace of the nation have been trampled upon by copious vicious effects. Today, we have plenteous sects that are religiously, politically and ethnically motivated. Likely appellations as; Boko-Haram, Fulani Herdsmen, Niger-Delta avengers, Militants, and Biafra are popular cliques that are making waves in insurgence related activities that are by all standards antisocial.

Amidst this earnest heart-pour, there is a big question which is yet a surprise. When one considers now, the raging “criminalistics” dramatizations all over the nation rolling repeatedly like a communal fiesta, two big question will come to mind “are these not the same people who once lived together in peace as one nation?” if this is true, another question is likely to arise, “even though we experienced a civil war long ago, is that a reason good enough for the so much confusion the people parade now even as a nation?” This is in fact astonishment, or is it because Nigeria is a multi-religious state? This is yet another inconsequential reason to rely upon because, Nigeria has since her making maintained a multi-dimensional setting not just in the basis of religion, but also in the sense of ethnic nationality, culture, and even politics. The need for relative peace, wealth, and development is supposed to spur a spontaneous reaction of an all-round corporation amongst country’s people. This is with the logic that these goals are chiefly dependent on an even cooperative service from all, irrespective of class as well as religious, tribal or political affiliations. Yesufu in a likely opinion puts forward that: “It is therefore, understandable that in a secular state like Nigeria, it is not unusual for people of different religious backgrounds to relate to one another wherever it will be more rewarding to them than living in isolation”. (43)

While Yesufu’s submission is supposed to be a typical reality, religion in Nigeria is amongst other vices a leading mark to a number of social disorders. This is probably due to its practice-based misapplication and misappropriation by Nigerians. It is no longer news that Nigerians are in the shear habit of using religion as parameter for judgment in politics and other secular engagements including when recruiting employees. This obsession has occasioned countless numbers of misjudgments all over the nation, which has in turn spurred ill impacts. The latter however contends with this sentimental rooted act of behavior when he said;

The Nigerian constitution pre-supposes that an individual has freedom to practice any religion of his or her choice without government interference. This is where secularization comes into play. Secularization is a legal or governmental position in the supreme law of Nigeria, stating that religious belief should not influence any public and/or governmental decisions. In other words, secularization is a documented position in a constitution relating to political belief in the separation of religion and state. (44). To remain clear on this, Yesufu further stresses that while people are allowed to practice whatever they believe in as their religion, the government must not allow that to influence public policy. Religion is the service and worship to God and gods. (44) The latter’s opinion is only a heart-felt outpour thus; his recommendation is without bias a modest one. After all, religion relays a

fundamental practice of a one-on-one relationship between God and man. This relationship in view supports a good moral standard in the lives of faithful adherents. No surprise, Durkheim a veteran sociologist articulates a theory that religion sees God as a personification of the society, where all the laws and commandments of God are demanded from all members of the society for self-preservation. (Yesufu, 44).

While Durkheim's philosophy may contend right, religion in Nigeria has gone beyond its natural frontiers by infiltrating deep into the marrows of various concerns of the society. Such 'busy-body' act is not just a misnomer but also a mis-function of the highest level. While religion presupposes a worship-based endeavor, with what is obtainable today, the practice has trans-modified so much to the point that it now features as an economic checkpoint where propagators amasses wealth from their exploited adherents who in turn finds hope of good fortune to come through their zealous followership, having been constantly promised a paradise to come. This paradise is surprisingly not what they hope to enjoy in heaven alone, but, wealth here on earth thus, the surrounding templates of most religious centers is the preaching of prosperity, great affluence and fame. The continuous quest for wealth has made the people so religious to the extent that they become blinded even when there are being exploited by their religious fathers. Thus, the masses keep giving from their peanut's treasuries, whereas, their receivers keep accumulating.

Owing to this fact, the failure of the government has encouraged and sustained the successes of religious exploiters. Lacking basic necessities inspires the masses to run to religious places where they are given hope. They are however ignorant of the fact that hope is not a strategy, but a form of escapism. A better strategy can rather be found in the amalgamation of the following; diligence, good preparation, having an innovative mind that is put to practical use, plus, subscribing to laws and principles which guarantees predictable outcomes.

Unfortunately, this is the politics of religion practiced in Nigeria, which is also the blueprint of the nation's economic system, thus, colorizes with Max's idea of a capitalist state. A capitalist state according to Karl Max only accommodates two basic classes which are; the bourgeoisies and proletariats. Capitalism is an economic and social system in which capital and non-labor factors of production, or means of production, are privately controlled; labor, goods, and capital are traded in markets; profits are taken by owners or invested in technologies and industries; and wages are paid to laborers. (*Economic Systems, n.d*)

Drawing from the source, capitalism only highlights the rich and the poor; the poor are the laborers who earn wages for their efforts in the

companies of the rich who are owners of labor. This sort of structure perpetually puts the poor in a hostile position as they keep getting exploited by the rich, just like in the church and other religious sects. With this buildup, the poor keep growing poorer as they are not always rewarded in accordance to their actual value, and the rich grow fatter as they keep exploiting the people. Such a case peculiar with Nigeria can be thus described as an "extreme" sort of capitalism.

With this analogy, it is glaring that politics in Nigeria also relies on such unbenevolent structure. Politicians are like the owners of labor in a capitalist state, while, the masses run all their jobs and get paid. A clarification to this sort of mirroring, tenders the undeniable fact that politics in Nigeria is a deteriorating enterprise, thus, Idada and Uhumwuangho's forward:

Over the years, the Nigerian government has failed to harness the vast human and material resources at its disposal to break the cycle of poverty and autocracy that has characterized it since independence in 1960. Thus, the Nigerian state has been constantly struggling between the forces of democracy and authoritarianism and characterized by the 'push for development and the pull for underdevelopment, the burden of public corruption and the pressure of accountability'. (50).

Such political failing as put forward by the latter has given rise to several horrid looking descriptions about the Nigerian political circle. Thus again, they observe the following thoughts about the Nigerian political concern.

Odion-Akhaine et al. describes the "Nigerian political turf" as bizarre. Kesselman wrote: "Nigeria today remains essentially an unfinished state characterized by instabilities and uncertainties". Ameh, likens the Nigerian state to a diabetic patient whose excess sugar in the blood stream served no positive purpose. According to him: Nigerians are definitely suffering in the midst of plenty, or how do you describe perennial fuel scarcity in a country that is the sixth largest exporter of crude oil; lack of potable water in a country with thousands of kilometer coast line (when landlocked and arid countries have gone beyond this primordial human need) or is it the problem of power supply in spite of our huge natural gas reserve again reputed to be one of the largest in the world? (50).

These level of derogatory opinions about a nation naturally requires a flaming reaction for a necessary fate twisting, but again, Odion-Akhaine et al. in condemnation spits another rot by affirming that:

Nigeria is not working. The citizen class is agonizing. Two new developments underline this point. One, the fuel queues have returned to the streets of Lagos and several other provincial capitals in the country. Oil, which

is the river between, has become a curse on the country and its people. The country's rulers have been unable to manage it and ensure that it reaches the end users. Rather, they have managed it to the extent that it enriches their pockets. (Qtd. in Idada & Uhumwuangho, 51)

Although he first provides a historical vanguard, Fyनेface stands in one accord with Idada and Uhumwuangho when he opined that:

The most challenging problems facing every nation, be it political or religious is leadership and good governance. This observably have been lacking, if not totally absent in Nigeria. From 1900 to the present day, the people have made efforts consciously and otherwise to appoint a truly democratic head of government, through the ballot who will protect their interests. Over the years, leadership and good governance have become tools used to build groups and personal wealth rather than the welfare of the people. (215)

These enriching and ever-growing pockets of politicians raises a wonder; don't they ever get filled? This is a necessary question because, they seem never satisfied, perhaps this principle; "greed is like salty water, the more you drink the more you thirst" is the living brain behind their unquenchable thirst for material gains. Hence, they keep fighting for more and bigger opportunities where they can control huge resources. This is a vivid and extreme scenario of what greed actually is. The masses are hoping for a better and easing future where the system will be a lot accommodating sequel to the nation's bounteous resources but, no, they keep getting deceived, exploited and used and reused.

Consequent of this damning setup is sure responsible for the restive atmosphere airing everywhere in the country today. How can people not be restive when a man has just two legs but owns a hundred shoes, when the wealth of a thousand persons is in the hands of a single man, when the houses of politicians and religious leaders are rather warehouses? And yet, they are not satisfied; they continuously seek to remain in positions in order to keep amassing wealth by pressing down the heads of the already harmed, deprived and disgruntled hoi-polloi. It is rather funny to note that despite this fact, people are still in faithful followership of these rulers. This is perhaps glued to the fact that the people are poor and hungry, and so, these political jingoes being wary of this truth take this as an advantage thus, they cripple the people as much as they can, by destabilizing relevant institutions thereby, creating a dysfunctional state. Consequent upon this plot, will permeate the masses to keep looking up to them for means, therefore, the politicians earn more credit in power and authority. Abate in likelihood, thus, describes the situation;

It is as if the chief task of governance has been the frustration of public institutions. The effect has been the flowering of the politics of personality. Too many so-called leaders wielding the powers of life and death sounding like the oracle on subjects in which they lack knowledge and competence. We do not have quality schools that can produce the strong breed of human beings that can compete with the best from any part of the world in terms of skills and ideas. To get quality education for your child, you need to send him or her abroad. We want foreign direct investment, but our roads are bad, there is no regular electricity supply, the railways is dead. The starting point for any development agenda is the provision of infrastructure. (Qtd. in Idada & Uhummwangho, 52)

The latter's opinion suggest corruption as the termite eating the nation's heart deep towards it death. What else could be better explained to have warranted the above if not for corruption? Therefore, to improve the weightiness of this fact, Idada & Uhummwangho affirms the following;

Recent reports on corruption in Nigeria revealed that corruption and related crimes in the country have attracted an annual revenue loss of \$25.76 billion to the nation in the last five years. On a daily basis, Nigeria is reported to be losing about \$70.575, 342 to corruption and related crimes. Also, a well-known non-governmental organization, Transparency International (TI), projected Nigeria in its corruption perception index (CPI) as being the third most corrupt nation of the world (131st of the country surveyed). (52)

This is to comfortably say that corruption has not only caused Nigeria so much financial losses, but have also spotlighted the people as morally dark in mentality, backwards developmentally, and religiously materialistic in nature. The fore listing "morally dark in mentality" is to suggest that Nigerians are typically and classily sentimental in almost all fronts. No questions they are artistically partial to truth, justice and merit. This emblematic intrigue of many Nigerians brings ethnicity focal again in this discourse. Qualifying a good leader, Fyneface (215), had rightly stated that; 'For a leader to be accepted in this vein he/she necessarily must be someone with a good reputation, a person that can show good example to his followers, with determination to implement his policies in any given organization or group', but when there is ethnic sentiment(s), the footprints of truth, merit and justice will be wiped away and substituted for undue favoritism, nepotism, tribal biases and prejudice displays, and cheating. These ethnicity stems are in fact, blue prints for corruption. From the conceptual ideals, the phenomenon is supposed to be a building block for development rather the ill treading it is linked with in Nigeria. Thus, Cox's observation; "...ethnicity or ethnic group as a socio-cultural entity "while inhabiting the same, country or economic area, consider themselves

biologically, culturally, linguistically or socially distinct from each other and most often view their relation in actual or potentially antagonistic terms". (Qtd. in Samson, 73)

With Cox's position, ethnicity is yet, a bizarre concept in Nigeria sequel to its unlikely usage especially in practice. This ill *modus operandi* of the concept is what Sampson derogates when he says that;

Unarguably, Nigeria is a country that is blessed with enormous human and material resources, but ironically, the same country has become the bastion of inequitable state policies, injustice, barefaced corruption, social decay, poverty-ridden, etc. where ethnicity has pervaded every facet of the Nigerian life, and more fundamentally determines who gets what, when and how. (73).

To explicate this claim, the latter indicts ethnicity further by saying that;

Ethnicity has been considered to be the cause of the 1967-1970 civil war in Nigeria, elections which have been rigged and those which have failed can be blamed on ethnicity, the manipulation of census figures can only be understood from the ethnic dimension. (73)

To plus up the above, ethnicity is just like religion a leading factor as it concerns politics and political playabilities. Since the attainment of independence in 1960, politics have been played within the basis of ethnicity. In recent days, the popular All Progressive Congress party (APC) have been accused to be a regional party, meanwhile, during the first and second republic such sectionalism was even worse. Samson relays thus;

Ethnicity still dominated the political scenario after the 1960 independence on Nigeria. The political parties remained regionally based and when the then leader of the Action Group (AG) Chief Obafemi Awolowo attempted to expand the horizon and reach of the party to a national level, he receives opposition from his very own deputy chief S.L. Akintola who believed that the party should continue to maintain their regional symbol and sustain their grip on the ethnic factor and sentiments. This conflict of ideology eventually led to the breakup of the party and the formation of the United People's Party (UPP) by Chief S.L. Akintola which later aligned with the NCNC and became the regional premier. (76)

There is no gain saying the impacts of ethnicity on various facets of the Nigerian society. Ethnicity exists in politics, religion, education, and other secular involvements. Its effects have been massively deteriorating in the context of social wellness and its growing intensity is to a fault. It is even more painstaking when combined with the ugly show-out of religion and politics. The coming in contact of the trio is by all standards the biggest leading to the problems of Nigeria today, thus, positive think-tanks should be encouraged

from all corners of the nation to see to the dearth of this dragging problem or its possible burial.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research paper shall be propagated with the use of Oscar Lewis's Culture of Poverty theory. An American anthropologist of the 1950s, Lewis Culture of Poverty theory was criticized heavily in the 1970s, however, it made a significant comeback in the 21st century. The principal argument of this theory is that, poor people are not just lacking basic resources to life, but are also lacking an optimistic attitude against their ill condition, thus, they are living with an acquired poverty-perpetuated life pattern. Azunwo and Sopuruchi explain vividly Oscar's reservation;

The subculture (of the poor) develops mechanisms that tends to perpetuate it, especially because of what happens to the world view, aspirations and character of the children who grow up in it. The latter struggled to render the "the poor" as legitimate subjects whose lives were transformed by poverty. (Azunwo & Sopuruchi, 80)

He argued further that although, the burdens of poverty where general, so imposed upon these members of society, they led to the formation of an autonomous subculture as children were socialized into behaviors and attitudes that perpetuated their inability to escape the underclass. This explains a simple theory "generational fluidity", being that a child who is born and breed in a poor home is likely to remain so and even transfer to his future kids.

Although, the latter's provision explains a generational continuity of poverty, rolling from parents to offspring, the theory essentially explicates why people who were born poor or poverty related tends to remain so. His argument states that these class of people do not just suffer physical poverty on account of their condition of lack and want, the most crucial aspect of their condition is the poverty-stricken mentality they hold. Such mentality is the brainchild behind their general perception of life. More so, this rational explains their patterned modus operandi for survival. Such attitude is relative to their moral values thus, Azunwo and Sopuruchi put forward; 'the culture of poverty is a concept in social theory that asserts that the values of people experiencing poverty play a significant role in upholding their poverty-stricken condition, sustaining a circle of poverty across generations.' (80)

Relatively, the Culture of Poverty theory explains why Nigerians whom of course are largely poor flag a low mentality, especially in view of their attempts to escape poverty or make earns meet. Their poverty-stricken mentality has maintained a culture or say attitudinal trend whereby they view their self so low to the extent that their ultimate quest for survival has caused

them to accept almost every means that is capable of fetching them earns meet. Coming to this cognizance, they compromise standards in almost all fronts all in the bid to survive, hence, cheating, lying, betrayal, dishonesty, partiality etc. becomes their handy tools for earning. Accordingly, this same sense relays the reason why it has been very easy for politicians as well as religious leaders to control and exploit the masses. The culture of poverty innate in them strikes the chord that causes the masses to look up to these leaders with stiff loyalty. Thus, they find little reason not to condescend to whatever terms rooted out by both religious leaders and politicians meanwhile, they keep getting exploited. Consequently, the rich keeps getting richer whereas, the poor remains stuck in their situational malady.

4. PLAY ANALYSIS OF HENRY BELL-GAM'S THE HIDDEN TREASURE

4.1 Synopsis

The discovery of crude oil (hidden treasure) in the community of Kohia/Omasi is lightly a good news but ironically conjures communal crisis instead of propagating development, harmony and peace amongst the people.

Eze Kohia, the paramount ruler does not fancy the antics of the discoverers of the hidden treasure (Schepetrolina Company Ltd.) hence, rejects bribe from the company to the greatest disappointed of his deputy Eze Omasi who in later scheme goes behind and accepts the bribe money. To safely enclose his depraving deeds, Eze Omasi arranges the kidnap of Eze Kohia.

Shortly after, his intrigue is uncovered by the gods through the community diviner who ensures his arrest and the release of the kidnapped Eze Kohia. Eze Omasi and his accomplices are napped and made to face the law.

4.2. Subject Matter

Bell-Gam's Hidden Treasure runs on the channel of greed as well as bribery and corruption in the face of plenteous wealth. The discovery of crude oil in the land by the Schepetrolina Company Ltd. breeds several intrigues and antics for two basic ends. One fueled by greed, thus, the attempt is to amass wealth even at the expense of many while the other, sitting under the backdrop of justice fights to protect the common good instead of being egotistical.

The unseen crude oil hence, becomes the subject of conflict. However, through the many tests and trials, justice prevails as those who insist on getting their hands dirty for a selfish course are brought to face the law.

4.3 Thematic Preoccupation

In relation to the subject matter, greed, impatience and disunity guarantees no good end as underdevelopment and communal crisis most likely becomes the net's catch. The story of the *Hidden Treasure* is almost a cliché as far as the Niger Delta region of Nigeria and crude oil exploration is concern. So many social qualms are usually linked to this concern, there is either the problem of gain sharing or oil spillage in the case of so much oil exploration activities. Hence, the offshoot of the above sees nothing but crimes such as thuggery, kidnapping, theft, impersonation, murder, deceit and cheat.

In most cases, these level of intense follow-up amounts to the problem of insecurity and this for sure have a longing economic disadvantage upon oil host communities as investors will see no other rational but to shy away due to so much unfavorable conditions created by the indigenes. The memorandum of this piece therefore, highlights the virtues of peace, patience, honesty, selflessness, and harmony as necessary ingredients that should take center stage in the face of tempting scenarios if there must be development just as exemplified in the intriguing spectacle of the *Hidden Treasure*.

4.4 Social Relevance

Essentially, the overriding lesson one could dutifully and judiciously deduce from this very piece is to say simply that greed, selfishness, disunity and dishonesty are unlikely vices that are capable of weighing down any developmental attempt of any given society. As clinically demonstrated in the *Hidden Treasure*, it is glaring that the aforementioned vices are not good for any sort of gathering, organization or institution. Eze Omasi's character presents a typical Nigerian attitude of materialism and greed. The typicality of this loud attitude aggregates to a number of copious negative dealings which are repulsive against the development of any society.

In earnest though, the play *Hidden Treasure* is socially relevant as it preaches to all and sunder the importance of communal behavior. Communal behavior foster the altitude of selflessness, honesty, love and unity which is good for the advancement of all. Eze Omasi's character nonetheless, shows a great lesson to all the consequences of greed and other associated depravities of extreme nature.

5. PLAY ANALYSIS OF AHMED YERIMA'S HARD GROUND

5.1 Synopsis

Hard Ground captivates the extreme experiences of a very young lad Nimi, who finds himself at the center of a very intense, terrorizing and

melancholic status quo of the Niger Delta struggle. After a ten years exile, the 18-year-old teenager returns to his parents (Baba and Mama) following an escape for his life against the trepidations of the climaxing bloody jungle.

On his homecoming, the fear of the most dreaded Don Puts Nimi in the face of three challenges. One is the challenge of explaining to his family the live frying story of the jungle that forced his return, two, of convincing them that he played no part in the death of about twenty comrades under his command who lost their lives in the struggle and the other surface from Mama's bitter and steady dislike of his new person.

In his defence however, Nimi suspects and accuse Father Kingsley of sabotaging their plan that led to their unexpected disarray. Father Kingsley's appearance nonetheless, and in alliance with Inyingifaa's rational fades Nimi's ignorant accusation and he is advised to think aright. Afterwards, he comes to full realization of his real enemy as disguised friends, well-wishers and awarders deceitfully attempt his murder. Barely recovering from this horrific state, the sad news bearing the death of his lover and baby carrier Pikibo is brought to his doorstep. He is dismayed at this and promised nothing but a swift equalizing revenge against the Don who is reportedly the culprit.

5.2 Subject Matter

Hard Ground is engrossed in the struggle of the Niger Delta and its related crisis which is in onion with crude oil exploration. What appears to be a blessing from the foreground at least with the massive oil boom of the 1970s is in no other sense drifting to be a curse sequel to the depraved liking circumstances surrounding oil exploration especially within the last two decades. Because of the diamonded preciousness of crude oil, instead of witnessing a stretching overhaul until the environs of the Niger delta equalizes with standard world cities, the nation's treasure base is instead grossly underdeveloped and worse, has become a homestead for gangster-ism, terrorism and militancy.

With the following misgivings, news pieces spawning within the Niger Delta basin has for a weighty period of time become non-attractive to the ears of an average Nigerian because of its recurrent recurrences which now qualifies it a cliché. This tiring attitude is fore-mostly linked to the hopes concomitant with crude oil upon its discovery in 1956 at Oloibiri. The irony however is that, while people hoped, they get nothing, not even the courtesy of crucial basic amenities instead, their lands play host as theatre of wars and streams of blood and worse, their lands suffer degradation resulting from the reckless oil explorative activities. These worries are in essence not just a subject matter in

Yerima's *Hard Ground* but is in a huge sense a topical crisis that behooves Nigeria as a sovereign entity.

5.3 Thematic Preoccupation

Drawing from history, at least within a sustainable period of time, one typical attitude that is synonymous with the Niger Delta region of Nigeria is insurgency cum militancy. This brashness is a petrifying fruit which stems out of the ill politics involving crude oil and its related dealings. While all ants are keen on the sugar of the Niger Delta, only a few shows a judicious interest for the good of the land.

White investors alongside related politicians have over the years shown gross tendency of gold digging from the oil basin whereas, there is little or no equalizing returns for what is heavily taken from the lands. Consequent of this fact, takes the people to no good end, instead fathers a number of social mishaps which are categorically likened to poverty and insecurity. Worse more, the people especially the youths become stretchily restive and with their restiveness, the leadings can only but be imagined hence, the poor do not just remain poor but also grow strengthened in their situational malady.

The typicality of the Niger Delta in fact, braces Yerima's nerves to have triggered the making of *Hard Ground* with so much intensity and thought-provoking attitude. Analytically however, the latter themes the work in the surrounding of the Niger Delta focal-ling on the qualms and struggles associated therein. Specifically, he hints on the reactive effects on the suffering land owners of the treasure which on copious ramification aggravates sourly just as express in the play's resolution.

5.4 Social Relevance

Vis-à-vis the critical standing of the theatre which is summarily mandated to entertain, edify and educate, Yerima's *Hard Ground* is in fact on course. It is not just in alliance with the mandate of the theatre, but with the keen interest of contributing to social order and development.

The fore admission is sequel firstly to the adoption of such a topical issue as subject matter, as well as the landing it entirely devised. Now, drifting in the direction of ethics, *Hard Ground* does its bit as it preaches holistically the menace of falling to dirty, violent and unlawful dealings as strategy or approach in a bid to owning one's right. For the records, apart from the slaughtering of about twenty young comrades of Nimi, which is quit a disaster, Baba and Nimi himself never secured a smooth landing against what they boarded for long ago.

Nimi, Baba and all others who fell as well as others who suffer differently in the play is only a tip of the iceberg when you equalize that analogy with the realistic happenstance in the Niger Delta especially of late. And so, the piece has a bitter reactive disposition against the drama and madness associated with the Niger Delta and crude oil hence, it expresses disdain against terrorism, militancy and insurgency in general as both its appearance and effect(s) are but a bunch of cataclysms for both the immediate inhabitants and the nation at large.

6. CONCLUSION

This research paper is judiciously carried out in probe of three alleged blueprints (Religion, Ethnicity and Politics) known to have heavy hands in larceny the peace, joy, prosperity, developments and overall advancement of the Nigerian society. These accused incriminates provides through critical discusses backed-up by an outstretched literary computation of scholarly affirmations the careful actualization of the researcher's tenet which is in full-fledged treaty with other critical submissions that the already indicted strangulating influences be at all cost brought to book. This decisive position is not one that should just be fancied for probably its witty expressiveness but ought to be treated with urgency and great heed following its already harmed effects which cannot be equated with any measuring device available to the universe today. The corrosive impacts of the formers as launched since the amalgamation of Nigeria in 1914 may never cease to spread its pitiless tentacles upon the Nigerian society if the people claiming ownership of the land continue to remain blinded by their very own follies. Bigot in nature to religious and political ecstasies, these tribalistic inhabitants' tenants of the four walls of Nigeria may continuously be clamped down and exploited by their master-oppressors and exploiters who in their crafty nature wield the senses of their loyal and steadfast aficionados to the gains of their pockets and unending bank accounts. As a matter of fact, no rational argument can possibly refute this realistic preposition especially because of the credibility of the common adage that goes "until a different thing is done, a resembling result will continually be seen at the end of each trial".

In relation to the Nigerian situation currently, can we expect any change hence we are never at end with our myopic tendencies, seemingly hypnotized mentality and extreme materialistic innuendos painted all over our actions and inactions. A practical answer to this question is simply that there can never be any change. However, on a second thought, perhaps, a stamped conclusion like this may as well be proven wrong because it suffices that a change could as well come, but can only be an improvement towards DE-

development and backwardness and not towards real improvements. Be that as it may, despite this extreme scenario we find ourselves today, there is still hope; a passage of victory still awaits the people's U-turn. However, to express with deep sincerity and without elements of bigotry is to say that progress can come only if we thread away attitude of intolerance in all fronts, embrace novelty and hard work and sniff against mediocrity, meanwhile accept openness to competition with the foregrounding that defeat can as well come from each struggle. And finally, be sincere to yourself and others by relying only on reasoning rather than emotional tendencies which are in most cases failing to reality and prudence.

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