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## **EDITORIAL**

The Chief Editor on behalf of the Editorial Board, has great pleasure in presenting the maiden edition Vol 1 No 1 of the Journal of the Faculty of Humanities, Social and Management Sciences (JFHSMS) Edwin Clark University, Kiagbodo to the research community and the world at large. JFHSMS aims to create a platform between the researchers and authors who seek to publish their work and the people who wish to keep up with the latest findings in the areas of Humanities, Social and Management Sciences. The journal provides opportunities to the researchers, academics and professionals to publish their research papers around the world. The quick review process, quality Editorial Board and quality articles guarantees this Journal as unique.

The Chief Editor is very grateful to the members of the faculty research committee and Editorial Board for their prompt and kind response towards the establishment of this Journal. Their contributions, no doubt is highly commendable and their efforts both human and material cannot be over-emphasized.

We seek the blessings and support of all in the success journey of the Journal.

Prof. (Mrs) Juliana O. Okoh

The Editor-in-Chief

# NEGOTIATING CULTURAL TOLERANCE: A READING OF ALICE CHILDRESS' "WEDDING BAND" AND JULIE OKOH'S "AISHA".

BY

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## ABSTRACT

Culture is an important element of every society, while prejudice and stereotyping are inherent phenomena of culture. For centuries the world has been torn apart by violence, racism, ethnicity, apartheid and anti-Semitism; all fuelled by unfair generalisations, stereotyped images, predisposed attitude and sentiments, albeit prejudices inherited from cultural environments. These cultural challenges eventually shape our worldview and actions, alter our natural inclination to accept others, and thus serve as artificial barriers that keep human beings apart and endanger the very existence of humanity. However, since its declaration of Human Rights, The United Nations has been promoting the spirit of multiculturalism or pluralistic cultural orientation in spite of cultural differences. How far has this spirit of unity in diversity become a reality in our daily life? How do we renegotiate the concept of culture in the face of the crippling guilt of ethnicity and racial discrimination currently tearing the world apart? By the way, what is culture? What is the relationship between culture and human behaviour? Can artistic creation serve as a veritable instrument for generating national integration and peaceful co-existence? In other words, can artistic creation propel transcending human values in the face of intra-cultural conflicts? These are some of the questions this paper seeks to address using the plays *Wedding Band* by Alice Childress and *Aisha* by Julie Okoh as paradigms for our discussion. The choice of the two plays is informed by the fact that although they originate from two geographical backgrounds that are distance apart; one from America while the other from Nigeria; they both correlate in their propagation of cultural diversity as a healthy catalyst for social evolution and progress, and the cultivation of enduring genuine love as a panacea for an embattled humanity. Moreover, the two plays are set within the same social environment, which is the family unit.

**Key Terms:** Culture, Prejudice, Stereotyping, Cultural Diversity, Ethnocentrism and Multiculturalism.

## Introduction

Culture is a broad term that encompasses beliefs, values, norms, behaviours as a way of being. Man is a kind of clay that society moulds to conform to its norm. Some anthropologists, especially those belonging to cultural determinism, maintain that people are what they are conditioned to be. Human beings are passive creatures and do whatever their culture tells them to do through the process of socialisation. **Useem, J., & Useem, R. (1963: 169)** highlight that most modern sociologists simply view culture as the learned and shared

behaviour of a community of interacting human beings. In the same vein, **Linton, R. (1945: 32)**, **Lederach, J.P. (1995: 9)**, **Damen, L. (1987: 367)**, affirm that culture is learned and shared human patterns or models for day-to-day living. These patterns and models pervade all aspects of human social interaction. Although one may think of oneself as an individual, one shares beliefs, rituals, ceremonies, traditions, and assumptions with people who grew up or live in similar cultural backgrounds. Hence, it is easier for one to relate to someone who has shared value



systems and ways of doing things than someone who does not share the same values. According to **Hofstede (1984: 51)** "Culture is a collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another." That means each person "carries within him or herself patterns of thinking, feeling, and potential acting which were learned throughout their lifetime." Hofstede also highlights that generally individuals accept the cultural elements of their environment without thinking about them and that they are socially transmitted by communication and imitation from one generation to the next. Gradually, these cultural elements become the tradition of that group of people. It then means that the environment, in which an individual is raised, exercises great influence in determining the person's psychological and sociological orientations. Briefly, culture binds together people living in the same cultural environment.

However, Peter Senge <sup>(1990)</sup> explains that mental models lock individuals and groups into a specific perception about the world. Like a computer, we are programmed to act or behave in certain ways. The conscious and unconscious learning we undergo, over time, turns into beliefs that we consider to be valid. We then teach each others that these beliefs are cultural norms, which are expressed in our daily lives as behaviours and actions. We become so accustomed to them as a fish is to water that it seems to us that our culture is *natural*.

From the perspective of *structural anthropology* developed by Claude Lévi-Strauss, we learn that there is not just one culture, but forms of culture. And that culture varies from one region of the planet to another. Cultural Diversity is the existence of a variety of cultural groups within a society. It is synonymous with multiculturalism. Multiculturalism is the coexistence of diverse cultures, races and ethnicities. It is defined by the Encyclopaedia Britannica as "the view that cultures, races, and ethnicities, particularly those of minority groups deserve special acknowledgement of their differences within a dominant political culture." It means "recognizing that other cultures exist.

Respecting each other's differences and acknowledging that all cultural expressions are valid." Cultural diversity is important in every setting in life. For it contributes to diversity of thought and perspectives that make learning more interesting and dynamic.

However, Levi-Strauss observes that people hardly accept this cultural diversity. Instinctively we take it that what is normal for us ought to be normal too for other humans. We believe that our cultural norms are valid universally. Therefore, whosoever is culturally different from us is not only perceived as a stranger, but as barbaric. Here lies the root of ethnocentrism, which means judging other cultures by the sole reference to one's own, via a projection of value judgements. Ethnocentricity is to collective consciousness what selfishness is to individual consciousness. That is to say although shared culture creates dynamism within an in-group, paradoxically, it can also create blind spots, where people segregate themselves from each other, and consider the other as stranger.

In the same vein, Auguste Comte, Max Weber, Émile Durkheim, C. Wright Mills, etc., aver that prejudice, briefly defined as thinking ill of others without warrant (Allport, 1958: 7) originates from learned behaviour. In general, stereotypes are negative statements and interpretations made about a group of people. Whether deemed positive or negative, stereotyping places people into boxes and categories and limits them to those specific perspectives. That is why people have instinctive tribal inclination, which motivates them to only associate with people if they belong to the same race, ethnic origin, nationality, religion, country club, same geographical location, or speak the same language with them. However, these instincts that unites and draws people to one another as a culture; are often some of the artificial barriers that serves to divide human beings.

For, human beings often adopt predisposed attitudes and inherited prejudices in dealing with others. And, our stored mental stimuli seem always to be the driving force forever guiding our assessment and evaluation of others. Hence, to a large extent, social programming is the root of man's inhumanity

to man. Our ability to commit all types of atrocities against humanity ranging from acts of genocide, ethnic cleansing, violence, racism, hate crimes, and our capability to carry out all forms of oppression, repression, exploitation and discrimination against other human beings is rooted in this social programming. That means just because people differ from us in racial or ethnic makeup, have different beliefs, and express life from a different cultural persuasion often drives us to be intolerant and hostile.

Briefly, enslavement to culture and traditions ultimately fuels divisiveness as opposed to cohesiveness and unity. We shall first of all look at how these views are dramatized in the two plays. Then we shall investigate how the two playwrights in their respective play, project the idea that socio-cultural prejudices can be transcended in order to foster social cohesion, unity and progress in societies.

### Synopsis of The Two Plays:

The action in Childress' *Wedding Band* takes place over a period of three days near the end of World War I, at a time when demands for equality were repressed by lynching and interracial marriage was prohibited by law in many States of America. The setting is Charleston, South Carolina, in the Jim Crow society of 1918. The main action revolves around Julia, a thirty-five year old black seamstress with an eighth grade education and her lover, Herman, an uneducated white man who owns a bakery.

When the play opens, Julia has just moved into a small backyard apartment after having been evicted from countless other houses. Her new neighbours ask her questions about her personal life. To satisfy their curiosity, she tells them that she has been in love with a man for ten years but that she cannot marry him because he is white. Next, Herman, visits Julia with a wedding cake and a gold wedding band to celebrate the tenth year of their love affair. The ring is mounted on a chain so that Julia can wear it, since they both realize that she cannot wear the gift as a wedding ring. They plan to buy boat tickets to New York, where Julia can legally marry Herman. But Herman is not free to leave until

he repays the \$3,000 he borrowed from his mother when he purchased his bakery. However, Herman assures Julia that he can repay his debts and join her in a year. As they continue to make plans for their wedding, Herman becomes ill of influenza and he collapses at Julia's home. The landlady refuses to call a doctor for fear that legal action will be directed against her for sheltering the couple; since it is illegal for a white man to be in the same house with a black woman. Instead, they sent for Herman's sister and mother to take him to a white doctor. But when Frieda, Herman's mother arrives, she refuses to carry him to the doctor until it grows dark enough to hide him. Meanwhile, a quarrel breaks out between Julia and Herman's mother. Finally, Herman is taken away amid many accusations and much rancour.

The last scene opens with Julia dressed in her wedding dress. She is surrounded by her neighbours. Then Herman arrives with two tickets to New York. But remembering the confrontation of the previous day, particularly the fact that his mother sneeringly reminded her that blacks and whites can never live together, Julia refuses to accept the tickets. She later changes her mind because of Herman. But eventually gives the tickets and her wedding band to Mattie and her child. The play ends with Herman dying in his lover's arms.

Set in contemporary Nigeria, the play, *Aisha* by Julie Okoh explores the challenges of inter-tribal marriage in the face of the ethnic sentiments currently tearing the country apart. The main characters of the play are Ehimare, a Christian and an Edo man from the southern part of the country and his wife Aisha, a moslem and a Kanuri woman from the North. Although they love each other passionately, "*but the love cannot flower into fruition because of tribal prejudices*" (53) At the beginning of the play, Aisha is greatly perturbed by her inability to have a child, in their ten years of marriage. Although Ehimare continuously reaffirms his love for her whether they have children or not, Aisha suffers greatly from insecurity. The main conflict in the play begins with the visit of Adesua, Ehimare's mother to the couple's house in Lagos. She berates Aisha for her inability to beget a child

for her son. They both quarrel and in the process, Adesua falls down.

Reading further into the play, one discovers that Aisha has had many pregnancies that ended in miscarriages due to the pressure she received from her mother in law, Adesua. All the medical doctors the couple consulted have consistently remarked that there is nothing congenitally wrong with Aisha. They attributed her numerous miscarriages to anxiety and stress. Hence they strongly advised the couple to avoid conflicts and stress.

However, Adesua interprets the problem differently. According to her, the union has been cursed from the very beginning because the couple offended their gods and ancestors by getting involved in inter-tribal marriage. She advises Ehimare to divorce Aisha in order to marry Etemini, the village girl she has been intending for him. To pacify his mother, Ehimare agrees to marry the village girl. But on the marriage day, taking advantage of a peculiar Edo traditional marriage rite, Ehimare ends up remarrying Aisha instead of Etemini.

### Vision of Prejudice and Stereotyping in the Two Plays

In the play, *Wedding Band*, prejudice, stereotyping and segregation are first introduced through the perception of black women. They are characterized as narrow-minded and opinionated. When Julia confesses her relationship with a white man to her landlady and co-tenants, they strongly disapprove of such relationship. Lula and Mattie cannot believe that Julia really loves Herman. They think that she has a relationship with him just because of his money. In vain, Julia tries to convince them that she genuinely loves Herman avowing that she sincerely loves him the way Mattie loves her husband, but they refuse to believe her words and their disapproval becomes obvious as they walk away from her.

Herman's mother is an embodiment of racial aggression and the idea of white supremacy. Her evaluation of the blacks, especially black women, is deeply tainted with prejudices. As soon as she enters Julia's apartment, she wants to erase all traces of Julia

on her son by burning his clothes, which Fanny finds in Julia's house. Instead of taking Herman immediately to the hospital for medical attention, she berates Julia for going against social conventions and norms. Like the landlady, Frieda is more interested in keeping up appearances than in saving her son's life. She tries to break up the relationship between Julia and Herman. This is because she regards Julia as 'black dirt' sticking unto her son. Julia tries to explain that she is a lady and not a piece of dirt deserving to be purged away. Neither is she an inferior woman just because she is black. She also tries to make Frieda believe that she is above the general level of the other blacks. However, Frieda makes her realise that to the white world, she is not different from the other blacks. She is nothing but a big simpleton that can be used by any man. Frieda is so repulsed by Julia relationship with her son that she vilifies her by accusing her of stealing money from Herman's wallet.

Frieda believes in racist ideology and is a staunch supporter of the Ku Klux Klan. During a moment of reminiscing, she recalls the high hopes she once had for Herman's future (47). She specifically evokes an image of a five years old Herman being physically forced to learn John C. Calhoun speech which fundamentally argues that black people are not equal to white:

*Oh, Calhoun knew 'bout niggers. He said, —MEN are not born...equal, or any other kinda way...MEN are made...Yes, indeed, for recitin' that John C. Calhoun speech .... Herman won first mention... at the Knights of The Gold Carnation picnic (47)*

As the issue of segregation continues to prevail, memories of Calhoun's speech permeate the scene and filters into Herman's feverish consciousness. In a state of delirium Herman lets go fragments of Calhoun's speech:

*It is a great and dangerous error to suppose that all people are equally entitled to liberty...It is a reward to be earned, a reward reserved for the intelligent, the patriotic, the virtuous and deserving; and not a boon to be bestowed on a people too ignorant,*

*degraded and vicious...to be capable either of appreciating or of enjoying it. (49)*

Julia is very disheartened to hear these stereotyped views about the blacks coming out of her beloved one, images that have been buried in his sub conscience despite his love for Julia. Julia suddenly finds within her a forceful voice to fight her opponent as she pointedly tells Herman's mother some uncomfortable truths. The women's argument escalates into a horrific verbal battle of racial insults as they throw at each other missiles of the worst racial epithets: "Miss Thelma my ass! Her first name is Frieda. The Germans are here!" ... "Black, sassy nigger!" ... "Kraut, knuckle-eater, red-neck!" ... "Nigger whore!" ... "Sharecropper bitch!" (50). Despite Julia's brave efforts in verbal outpouring, the war of racist altercations ends with Herman's mother releasing her ultimate political weapon: "*White reigns supreme ... I'm white, you can't change that*" (51). Hearing that, all verve, all humanity drains out from Julia as she angrily attempts to cleanse her house of whiteness. For, the old woman's vicious words have sullied the beauty and memory of the interracial love she and Herman have preserved for so long. Despite his mother's feelings about Julia, Herman remains resolute about his relationship with Julia. Frieda has to employ strong men to bundle Herman out of Julia's apartment.

Like her mother, Annabelle, Herman's sister also wants Herman to break off from Julia and marry a white woman who can help to take care of their mother. Annabelle is a war-time volunteer at the Naval hospital, but when Herman falls sick she renders him little or no help. Like her mother, she is also opposed to calling a doctor and wants to wait for the protection of darkness before moving Herman out of the black neighbourhood.

Prejudice and intolerance are important themes in *Wedding Band*. It is the society's racism and intolerance that keep Julia and Herman from marrying and also prevent his relations from seeking medical attention for the dying Herman. Although it is very obvious that Herman's mother is prejudiced against black people, it is also clear that the black characters in *Wedding Band* are suspicious of

the white characters, particularly of Herman. Moreover, Julia's isolation from the community is the result of prejudice and intolerance. She has been forced to move several times because of prying neighbours who disapprove of her interracial love affair with Herman. Since South Carolina law forbids marriage and cohabitation between blacks and whites, Julia must isolate herself or risk being prosecuted and punished by legal authorities. She is lonely, isolated, and ashamed that she is not respectably married. Worst of all, she sees herself as a social outcast, rejected by member of her own black race and certainly not welcomed by whites. Consequently, **Julia suffers** alienation and loneliness as she endures the strain of ten years of social disapproval and isolation. The miscegenation law that forbids their union serves to illustrate the depth of social intolerance and prejudice that characterized the south in the earlier twentieth century.

Although in the play, racial discriminations and stereotyping are not directed at Blacks alone, for some Whites, Asians and Jews are also victims of racism. However, the anti-black prejudices are by far the most damaging. Childress exposes the reality of life for black and white Americans as she explores the frailty of humanity so entrenched in maintaining cultural conventions and ethnic boundaries that it forgets that there are lives at stake. Through the evocation of historic memories throughout the play, Childress appears to be reminding her audience of the reality of racism, and also of the necessity to continue the fight against rampant discrimination and segregation. **She** emphasizes that personal prejudices, racial discriminations, socially prescribed stereotypes and culturally constructed modes are inimical to human relationship. And she is telling her audience to rise up and fight against them.

In the play, *Aisha*, Adesua is the proponent of cultural traditions and social norms. She believes strongly in tribal segregation. The only reason Adesua bluntly refuses to acknowledge Aisha as the son's wife is that she is from another tribe. She avers that the only way to secure peace and harmony in

marriage and to also have the fruits of the womb is through intra-tribal marriage, celebrated according to the customs and traditions of the people. She therefore advises Ehimare to divorce Aisha in order to marry Etemini, a young girl in their village.

Throughout the play, she constantly spices the dramatic action with her stories of tribal sentiments and religious intolerance couched in her narrations about the late 1960s Nigerian civil war. To justify her bias against Aisha she paints stereotypical images of her people:

*"Hausas are too dangerous. They are ready to kill without thinking. They have no human feelings.(...) Right from the time of the civil war till today, any small thin they burn down houses. They burn down churches. They burn down properties worth millions of naira, belonging to southerners."* (30)

Further down, in an outburst of rage, she sputters to her son: *"I have said I don't want any Hausa trouble. Let her go and marry a man from her village."* (31) As a result of her obsessive concern, suspicion and persistent hate speeches against Aisha and her people, Adesua almost causes a divorce between Aisha and Ehimare. During the climatic moment of the play, in a feat of anxiety, frustration, hypertension and confusion, induced by pressure and disparagement received from his mother, Ehimare slaps Aisha and she runs out of the house. For she couldn't believe that the very man for whose sake she abandoned everything, including her family, relations, friends, culture especially her religion could lift up his hand to slap her because of his mother. His mother who has relentlessly tried to make life unbearable for the couple with her hurtful comments and antipathetic conducts.

Just like Adesua, Aisha's parents do not condone inter-tribal marriage. In a flashback scene, we are told that the first day Ehimare visited Aisha in her parents' house, her

father chased him out with a dagger. Her parents tried everything to separate them because of their tribal differences, to the extent that Aisha's parents decided to transfer her from Lagos to a school in Kaduna, with the intention of marrying her off to a man from her village after completing her teacher training education at Bayero College of Education. However, destiny brought the couple together again during their National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) engagement. Living far away from the divisive watchful eyes of their parents, their love blossomed and flourished. Before they knew what was happening Aisha was pregnant. In spite of their parents' opposition, they exchanged their nuptial vow in a marriage registry according to the statutory law of the country.

The fear of ethnic prejudice and hostility in inter-tribal relationships is also ex-rayed in the sub-plot of the play. Ruddy, Aisha's maid, a Yoruba girl is being courted by Chike, an Ibo man who is Ehimare's driver. But Ruddy is reluctant to pay him any serious attention because of his state of origin. We also learn that she has previously turned down many marriage proposals because of her fear of ethnic prejudice and hostility as could be seen in the following extract:

*CHIKE: You this girl, what's wrong with you? You refused to marry the security man because he is Tiv. Now you are rejecting me because I am Ibo. Whom are you waiting for? Your tribe's man?*

*RUDDY: Una leave me alone boo. I go marry una, make una mama come pour pepper for my eyes because I no be una village girl. Na so.(26)*

However, despite all her efforts to repress her natural feelings for Chike and to discourage his marriage proposals, she ends up getting pregnant for him and eventually agrees to marry him. Serving as an analogy to the main plot, the subplot helps to illuminate the depth of ethnic bias in the society. According to Aisha, ethnic sentiments are deeply rooted:

*in everybody in this country, including every man and woman,*

*young and old. In the family, at schools, in places of work or worship, anywhere, everybody is obsessed with his tribe and people cluster together in clique: Ndigbo, Afenifere, Arewa, Izon. So much so that we suspect each other, feel towards one another so much hatred, so much bitterness.* (50)

That is essentially because Nigeria is a multi-ethnic nation with diverse cultural groups that are about 360 in number. However, none of these groups was a nation in any sense before the colonial regrouping. It was the colonial government that merged them together in 1914 and later Balkanized Nigeria into tripartite structure in 1946 along ethnic lines. Since then, each of the groups has been crying of being dominated by the others; each is crying of political marginalization, each has been jostling for recognition and relevance in the political arena. The clamour seems to be getting louder as the years roll by and even seems to threaten the corporate existence of the nation. So much so that Nigerians have become slaves to their ethnic origins to which they pay their allegiance to the detriment of national unity. Fanatical ethnic consciousness has resulted into ethnic prejudice and mistrust, religious and political problems, and socio-cultural conflicts. These phenomena permeate every sphere of life in Nigeria, be it employment, education, religion, family life even admission into federal Institutions. Whatever is done in Nigeria, particularly at government level has ethnic undertone. And this has been detrimental to national unity, development and progress.

### **Enduring Love as a Healing Balm for Embittered Humanity**

The issue of Intertribal marriage dramatized in Julie Okoh's *Aishais* is very similar to that of interracial marriage treated in Childress's *Wedding Band*. In both plays the male protagonists are caught between their love for their spouses and their mothers' hatred for the same women. In Children's play, Herman seems to be the only character who does not see people in terms of race; he treats Julia and her black neighbours the same way he would treat any person of any colour. What Julia admires in

Herman is not his wealth nor privileges but his human kindness and caring nature. Appreciating him, she says: "*you nursed me when I was sick ... paid my debts ...*" (130). He is always there for her through thick and thin.

One can actually feel the profundity of Herman's love for Julia if one juxtaposes Herman's mother picture of her relationship with her own husband beside Herman's declaration of love for Julia. Herman's mother's marriage to Herman's father strictly obeyed the laws and conventions of their society. However, it collapsed because it lacked an important sustaining ingredient. Their marriage was loveless. That is why they couldn't tolerate each other. Whereas Herman's mother speaks about her marriage with disinterestedness and aloofness, Herman talks about his love for Julia with endearment and enthusiasm. Julia and Herman confront a tradition of separation of the races with their love for each other. Social convention and norms dictate that individuals should only love and choose a spouse from their race. And the miscegenation law reinforces that custom, but in this play Julia and Herman challenge that custom and tradition, fortified with strong fate in their love for each other.

Julia's belief in the possibility of having desegregation in the future is evident in the rousing speech she gives on the porch as Nelson Green, Lula's adopted son, prepares to return to the army after his leave of absence:

*You're comin' back in glory... And those medals and that uniform is gonna open doors for you... Nelson, on account-a you we're gonna be able to go to the park. They're gonna take down the n—colored signs.* (58)

Even though Fanny, her landlady is sceptical about the possibility of desegregation when she says: "*Some of us ain't ready for that*", and Nelson himself equally asks: "*you believe all-a that?*" (58-9). Julia remains firm in her hope for the future. By so doing, she embodies the necessary spirit for the struggle against segregation. However, her optimism is temporary dampened when Herman appears in

the yard, holding two boat tickets bound for New York. For, they are “colored tickets” (59), meaning that they obviously cannot travel together. This again, instantly resurrects in her the issue of colour contradiction and awareness. She begins to express a keen racial awareness, a dawning realisation that she is not separate from the black community, that she is not different from those relatives, friends and strangers who worked and slaved free for nothing (60-1). The entire history of slavery and the continual perpetuation of racial discrimination haunt Julia. Herman attempts to console her by saying it was not his fault: “I didn't do it...and you blamin' me for it” (62). However, her accusation is not directed at Herman, but at all white people, for the fact that the blacks were never allowed to vocalize their sentiments whenever somebody was lynched, that they had to bury and swallow down their opinions (62-3). At this brief moment of retrospection, the issues of their racial histories that have remained submerged for ten years in their social seclusion are forced to the surface. The conversation becomes an examination of their long-term relationship, of their mutual hidden shame and general anger at the law that denies their natural and positive feelings.

Julia becomes increasingly troubled because over the years she has envisioned that their love can transcend racial discrimination. However, at the end of the play, she decisively expels from her house white racism and its expression. But she leaves room for her loved one, Herman. This view is symbolically demonstrated in the play when she locks out Herman's family but allows Herman in. That means her love for him lives on. There is still a place for him in her life, though she has shut out the racism in him.

Wedding Band argues for the right of all people to love one another and live together as equals. Their concluding memory is of **togetherness, of leaving behind all the negative aspects of a society that instilled the double cultural encoding of black in a white dominated culture.** As Herman and Julia talk they remember their years of love and closeness, and they finally resolve the tensions that separated them. In **his last moments on earth**, Julia evokes an image of both of them

on a ship waving good-bye to everyone.

In Julie Okoh's play, *Ehimare* and Aisha defy social conventions and norms by falling in love and marrying someone from outside the boundaries of their ethnic groups. *Ehimare* is a staunch proponent of multiculturalism. Everything he says or does reflects this spirit. In fact, his household is a microcosm of the Nigerian Nation. The inhabitants cut across the major tribes in the country. According to him:

*every community is now made up of people from different cultural background. In this house for example, our maid is Yoruba, the driver is Ibo, the security guard is Tiv, the gardener is Hausa/Fulani, my wife is Kanuri and I am Edo. We live under the same roof. In our daily existence, we share our life together. We relate to each other without thinking of place of origin.*

*(...)Tribal sentiment is an after thought, a connivance to hurt the other person” (59)*

He further emphasizes that since contemporary societies are now cosmopolitan, people must learn to treat other people's culture with respect and tolerance. For, that is the only way to promote innovation and progress:

*There is no culture that is monolithic or static. Every society incorporates several cultures. For, as people travel from place to place, they carry their culture along with them. They also meet people from other places and learn from them. Taking the best out of their different cultures, they form a new way of life, different but superior to their individual cultures. (...) When cultures meet in a spirit of tolerance and understanding, they further the cause of progress. (52)*

Aisha also shares these views on cultural diversity, tolerance, innovation and progress. That is why she was able to resist her father's several attempts to break up her relationship with *Ehimare*. Reminiscing on their aborted pre-marital dream and aspirations, she laments:

*... we thought we could use our diversities to build up a home infused with new values made up of our multicultural existence; my Kanuri and Fulani origin mixing with your Edo and Yoruba backgrounds to form a hybrid culture. This vision swelled up in me as my first baby gained weight in my womb.( ...) Then your mother came raining abuses on me, poking accusing fingers at me. Intolerance, verbal violence and brutality, psychological trauma, became my lot. Gradually, everything flew out of me. Now I am completely empty and hopeless. (49-50)*

Ehimare and Aisha strongly believe that since they live together, they are bound to influence each other in certain ways. The important thing is that people from diverse cultural backgrounds should try to understand one another, tolerate and respect each other's cultural differences in order to live in peace with one another. That is to say we must learn to accept the diversity of culture. For diversity is a natural phenomenon. It adds beauty and value to human existence.

Based on this perspective, Julie Okoh in her play emphasizes that a united, productive and progressive country, can only be accomplished when peace exists among the various tribes and cultural differences are set aside for the betterment of the country. Paying less attention to cultural differences, and allowing natural love to flow, people can unite and work together to build a stronger and more acceptable nation. Aisha succinctly expresses this idea when she affirms: *A woman's body is like a community. A community where there is internal discord and rancour cannot progress. Productivity and progress can only take place where there is peace. (21)*

Ehimare and Aisha's relationship is proof that they undoubtedly have more in common with each other than their tribes want to admit. The couple realize that more important than their tribal identity is their shared identity as human beings:

*Tribe! Tribe! Tribe! I'm tired of all these talks about tribe. When I look*

*at you, I see a human being and not a tribe. When I need love or friendship, I yearn for human beings and not for a tribe. The kind of person they are, the way they relate to me, their disposition, understanding and consideration, these are the qualities that attract and endear them to me and not their tribe. (51)*

This common denominator, that is their humanness, is what stimulates their love and friendship, enables them to hold on tightly to each other despite their tribal differences. And that is also why in spite of all oppositions they remain unwavering in their commitment to each other. According to Ehimare:

*Love is the silent language of life. Without love there can be no communication or friendship. But with love, people of different cultural backgrounds can become unified into one body and soul. (35)*

The idea that love and commitment are essential ingredients for unity and peace in the home, in a country and in every human relationship is a recurrent motif in Okoh's play. Further down Ehimare explains to the anxiety-ridden Aisha:

*The basis of every successful marriage is not tribal consideration but personal attraction, love and spousal commitment to make the marriage work. We love each other very much. That is what matters. You are now a part of my existence. Do you think I can survive a day without you? (52).*

Yes indeed, with mutual love, respect and understanding, Aisha and Ehimare conquer the turbulence that was rocking their marriage, brought about by ethnic intolerance and outbursts from their relations, which led to Aisha's frequent miscarriages. Towards the end of the play, overcoming her insecurity, which is the basic feeling of people who are victims of prejudice (Allport, 140), Aisha asserts herself. Claiming her Kanuri identity, symbolised by wearing her Kanuri attire, she comes prepared for the wedding ceremony full of joy. (69)

The play emphasizes the need for



every Nigerian to appreciate and value one another irrespective of tribe, religion, class, and political affiliation in order to work together to engender peace and development in the country. Whereas too much emphasis on differences divides, emphasis on similarities serves to call attention to the common ground upon which cooperation between the various branches of the human family may proceed (Allport, 114)

The play leaves the audience with a sense of hope. For, the resolution of the conflict at the end of the play celebrates the peace at home and hopefully in the country. Therefore, it is hoped that if Nigerians watch or read the play, they may be favourably disposed to make new laws that will bring about a new Federal structure that will lead to the harmonious co-existence of the various ethnic groups in Nigeria. So through her play, Okoh is advocating for the different cultural sub-groups to set aside their tribal sentiments in order to work together like Ehimare and Aisha for the unity and progress of their nation. Ehimare sums up this aspiration when he says:

*One day all the various tribal sub groups in this country will merge into a united powerful nation where individuals will be rewarded according to merit instead of tribe. That is if we all learn to accommodate each other; work together in the spirit of national unity* (53)

## Conclusion

Although, for many decades, the United Nations has been emphasizing the benefits of *cultural diversity*, it would seem that the citizens of the world are just paying lip service to the concept of multiculturalism and the chants of living in a pluralistic society. In reality learned behaviours still imprison and render people all over the world confined to their cultural prejudices and stereotyping.

Arguing that socially imposed prejudices serve as artificial barriers that keep human beings apart, the two playwrights emphasize that national integration and progress can only be achieved through a conscious effort to create among people, an awareness of the benefits of cultural diversity.

The French anthropologist, Claude Levi-Strauss (1978: 16) affirms that: “*difference is extremely fecund; it is only through difference that progress has been made*” and that “*the diversity of culture is necessary for the very existence of mankind, and it is in certain respect consubstantial with human nature.*” (20-21). That is to say difference is not harmful but beneficial. Cultural diversity is potent of many benefits that enable individuals to approach the world from various perspectives. And varied perspectives of looking at the world lead to innovative thinking and accelerate productivity. Therefore, it is only through the development and entrenchment of true love and acceptance of cultural diversity that human beings can eventually strategize actions that will engender sustainable development and also guarantee national peace and security. So, instead of fuelling ethnic sentiments, racism and intolerance, the two dramatists recommend the promotion of respect for cultural diversity and cooperation in a climate of mutual trust and understanding. They emphasize that genuine love for fellow human beings is a healing balm that can douse the pain of prejudice and bigotry in contemporary societies. Briefly, they try to use their drama to encourage the cultivation of enduring genuine love as a panacea for an embattled humanity.

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