

# THE NATIONALIST CULTURE IN AKINWUMI ISOLA'S *HERBERT MACAULAY AND THE SPIRIT OF LAGOS.*

Oludolapo Ojediran. & Adams Ayomide A.

---

## ABSTRACT

*In the preservation of cultural heritages, culture and nationalism are two factors that are brought together for the peaceful existence of a society. While national identity is a continuous process that grows with the society because it involves the maintenance and rebuilding of the pattern of values, norms and cultural heritage identified, it also helps to foster unity among the people. However, this paper analyses Akiwunmi Isola's Herbert Macaulay and The Spirit of Lagos within Smith (1991) ideology that sees nationalism as a conscious effort of a community to stay together. Therefore, this paper observes that the analysed not only the conscious effort but struggle to fight against any external forces that want to disrupt the peaceful co-existence of its people*

## INTRODUCTION

Culture, no doubt is a basic feature of a society. By society, we mean different groups of people that have come together with the same interest, goals and ideas and are working together to achieve a significant purpose. In fact, Famade (2001, p.23) asserts that "a basic feature of a society is that individuals and groups within it interact through various social organizations and institutions. Through these interactions, they become aware of the problems of their society, and try to find ways of solving them for the benefit of the people". However, elements of culture cannot be divorced from the nature of the society which includes the way individuals dress, eat and talk to the manner of approach to situations within that society, their culture is defined. Belonging to a particular society therefore brings the question of national identity such as: why am I here? What is my duty to this society? What can I do to improve the society? What is the duty of the society (government) to the citizens? And many other questions that people can ask in order to locate themselves in the society. When all these societal values are interrupted by external force, the spirit of Nationalism is called for by members to protect their societal heritage.

Thus, the spirit of nationalism reacts strongly to this external force that threatens the values cherished by that society. While this paper examines

nationalism as employed by Akinwumi Isola's *Herbert Macaulay and the Spirit of Lagos* (2009), it also deals with the cultural aesthetics that the playwright uses to narrate history in a dramatic form. However, ideology in this paper is analysed as a system of political view and cultural values that is identified by the playwright. Through this historical play, the paper sees the impacts of nationalists to protect their territory and cultural heritage against white colonialists.

Culture is one of the most important aspects of man's society. The day to day events of man are characterized with series of behaviours, thinking and ideas that are developed as he interacts with his environment. Hofstede (1994, p.5) observes that "Culture is the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another." This implies that what is acceptable in community A may be abominable in community B. This leads us to aesthetics which embraces seeing life from two different dimensions, that is, what is culture to me might not be culture to you.

The definition of culture varies from one society to another. It goes beyond perceiving a subject in a particular society in the same manner with other societies. It is defining and understanding the characteristics in that subject to suit that society. Little wonder Schwartz (1992) as cited by Avruch (1998, p.17) states that "Culture consists of the derivatives of experience, more or less organized, learned or created by the individuals of a population, including those images or encodements and their interpretations transmitted from past generations, from contemporaries, or formed by individuals themselves." This means that culture is inherited and conserved for generations unborn.

The new generations therefore embrace the pattern of doings of their ancestors, and this also become their cultural patterns and guide to life. The culture is manifested in the aspect of dressing, language expression, food, approach to societal issues, marriage affairs and other tangible and intangible features of their society. When a foreigner enters that society he can define and observe them as described by Schein (1990, p.111) "from the physical layout, the dress code, the manner in which people address each other, the smell and feel of the place, its emotional intensity, and other phenomena." Therefore, culture is summarized to be a way of life and the laid down rules and regulations that guides the society. This is because everything man perceives, values and learns come from participating in a cultural system. His potentials are realized within the structure of his culture and through growing up in close contact with others around him. This is mirrored in Andah (1982,



p.4) that 'culture embraces all the material and non-material expressions of a people as well as the processes with which the expressions are communicated'. This shows that the culture of the people influences the way they use language, perceptual engagement and aesthetical values. While Driller (2004, p.58) identifies that 'culture is a difficult concept to grasp', he still notes that it is basic to human existence intertwined with nature.

This sums it up that nationalism is a culture in human culture. Also, the ideology of nationalism is inspired by cultural, political, and economic advances in the immediate society. The development in communication extends the knowledge of people beyond their societies. This gives them the opportunity to learn about other people's way of living. The spread of western and traditional education give people the feeling of participation in a common cultural heritage. Through education, people learn about their background and identify themselves with the historical continuity of their societies. In his definition of Nationalism, Esman (1994, p.28) summarizes it as that which "proclaims the distinctiveness of a particular people and their right to self-rule in their homeland."

This simply means that nationalism is founded on the idea of a society and its rights to self-determination at all times. It is perceived with the control and national identity of one's homeland. In fact, the bridge between the society members and nationalism is national identity. Due to their sense of belonging, the members take it as their responsibility to protect their territory and cultural heritage from all sorts of aggression. In view of this, Guibernaeu (2001, p.79) asserts that a nation and its people is bound by a common culture and those ideas, artifacts, memories that symbolize it. A common culture favors the creation of solidarity bonds among the members of a given community and allows them to imagine the community they belong to as separate and distinct from others.

The society grows harmoniously because of its common ties, beliefs and interest. Unity triggers the members to work together and achieve a particular goal together. Nationalism is a behaviour seen when the society members are called to duty to defend or show respect to their society. This spirit is evident in the efforts of some groups of individuals who fought to attain independence from external control for their society. It is important to note that culture is the main symbol of national identity in societies.



Therefore, culture and nationalism are two factors that are brought together for the peaceful existence of a society. In the preservation of societal and cultural heritage, Smith (1991, p. 72) identified five ways nationalism is thus:

- The whole process of forming and maintaining nations.
- A consciousness of belonging to the nation.
- A language or symbolism of the nation
- An ideology (including the cultural doctrines of nations)
- A social and political movement to achieve goals of the nation and realize the national will.

This means that nationalism is the consciousness of the society. It is the devotion of leaders and followers to protect their national interest, beliefs and opinions from being interrupted by any force. New set of ideologies are formed when there is agreement between members of the society. However, Nationalism is not a compulsory act as some people deny the identity of their societies to pay allegiance to other societies basically for their personal interests and the benefits that come along with them. These individuals become the minority and lack recognition because their source of national identity cannot make them exceptional from the majority. If nationalism is communicated appropriately, it becomes the language of that society.

### **Synopsis of *Herbert Macaulay and the Spirit of Lagos***

Akinwumi Isola retells the historical moments in Lagos characterised with the exploitation, racial segregation and colonial oppression of the whiteman which was tackled by Herbert Macaulay and others by their coordinated actions for freedom and resistance against the Whiteman's aggression. Clifford quarrels with the Eleko for not supporting most of his developmental opinions most especially the water rate issue; he also frowns at the King for recognising Muslim chiefs in the land without his consent.

The concern of Macaulay and others in the play is that nobody should rule and dictate to the King on how he should run the affairs of his territory. Another manifestation of the colonial attitude is the inadequate compensation on the Apapa land case of the Idejo chiefs by the foreigners. This was one of their ways to deprive the chiefs of their right. Macaulay presents the Land case and other affairs that concerned the Oba before the Privy Council in London and he wins. Clifford insists that the King must sign some documents which contain statements that he knows nothing about what Macaulay did in London. The King refuses to sign which annoys governor Clifford and he exiles him to Oyo where he serves his banishment. The strenuous efforts of Herbert



Macaulay and other concerned Lagosians lead to the exposure of the limitations of the Clifford administration and the triumphal return of the King back to Lagos.

**Nationalism as a Culture in Akinwumi Isola's *Herbert Macaulay and the Spirit of Lagos*.**

Nationalism is a consciousness and commitment to protecting the culture and interest of a nation-state which became popular in Africa states during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. While it was in existence in Europe and America in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, African witnessed the rise and struggle of nationalist movement to create a sense of national and cultural identity. Kellas (1998, p.66) observation, he identified three general approaches of Nationalism as: Ethnic Nationalism, Civic or Social Nationalism, State or Official Nationalism. Nationalism in the context of Isola's play is in consonance with the State or Official Nationalism which Kellas describes as "the nationalism of the state, encompassing all those legally entitled to be citizens, irrespective of their ethnicity, national identity and culture"(1998,p.67).

This is expressed by the people of Lagos in terms of their patriotism towards their King's administration even when it was shaken by external aggression. The Lagos spirit (struggle) as reflected in the activities of Macaulay, Obasa, Egerton Shyngle, JK Randle and a host of others contributed to the epic triumph over the Whiteman in Lagos. The nationalist ideology in these ones show that the individual's loyalty and devotion to the building of a nation state is supreme than the interest of any other man or group as displayed by the Whiteman. This is visible in Governor Clifford's decision to imposing water rate which the King opposed and in the process, saw his idea as a way of exploiting his people. Not minding the consequence, he refused the water rate issue solely because of the welfare of his people. The King sees the water rate payment as bringing debt to his people. In the play, the Eleko remarked as follows:

**ELEKO:** Emi o le gbagbese lo fun awon eniyan temi nile o (I cannot take debt home for my people) ... (p.17)

The nationalist spirit is also evident when Herbert Macaulay took the Apapa Land case upon himself and presented it before the Privy Council; He considered the inappropriate payment made for the land by the whitemen as robbery and undermining of the rights of his people. Jumoke Obasa, Alimotu Pelewura also demonstrated their spirit of nationalism when they organized a peaceful faction to reject the order that women should start paying tax rate. To wrap it up, they wrote a petition to the governor where Obasa stated:



**OBASA:** Now we shall all march peacefully to deliver this petition to the Governor in his office. (p.59)

After the king's exile, the nationalists also took measures by ensuring that the King returns to Lagos, they consult eminent lawyers and also made several meetings to bring their King back to the colony. This is noted in Shyngle's line that:

**SHYNGLE:** ...we have already sought a declaration and injunction that the order served on the Eleko is of 'no effect, null and void'. (p.94)

The injunction favoured the nationalists and the Governor is left with no option than to return the King to Lagos even after other hidden attempts to execute the king failed. It is appropriate at this juncture to consider the issue and culture, Culture in the Lagos colony, and globally, is a way of life that grows with human existence. It is an experience that affects the opinions, beliefs, behaviors, values, norms and perceptions of a group of people to act the way they do in a given environment. Therefore, this description of culture reveals that it is an entity that cannot be separated from the society. The society grows with culture; the culture develops with the society.

While the society is made up of people with the same culture who interact from time to time in order to meet the needs of their society, it is also made up of different classes of people united by the same social interest. This mirrors Famade's (2001, p.23) view that:

a basic feature of a society is that individuals and groups within it interact through various social organizations and institutions. Through these interactions, they become aware of the problems of their society, and try to find ways of solving them for the benefit of the people.

Famade's view of society reflected in the efforts of Herbert Macaulay and other Lagosians who are the forces against the Governor from trampling over their own cultural heritage. They are always ready to tackle every steps of the governor against their king and the colony which belongs to them. In the play, one comes across a scene like this:

**MACAULAY:** Please, ladies and gentlemen. I know I cannot avoid some hot exchanges if we are to tell ourselves some home truths. Indeed I believe this is the time to remind those of our friends who have been chewing stale political gum to brush and



sanitize their mouth with some confessions and new commitment to change. The white man says he wants to develop Lagos for the indigenes and you believe him. He says you must cast off your identity to attain development you say 'amen'. But we know why you follow the white man so sheepishly: everyone considers the ideology that fills his pocket to be the right ideology. . . (p.37)

Also, this is evident in the lines of the Reverend that came to pay solidarity to the King after the stoppage of the King's stipend by the governor:

**REVEREND:** ...There may be many religious faiths, Kabiyesi, but there is only one Lagos. (p.26)

At this point, readers are made to understand that what binds a society together is not just religion but their ability to interact and live together in peace and harmony. In the beginning of the play, Omoeko emphasizes the position of Eleko in the Lagos colony through his statement; he says there cannot be any development where the king is ignored:

**OMOEKO:** ...The king rules by right! Yes! By the rights conferred by cultural tradition...You ignored the Oba, you abandoned the people and you are talking of development!(p.4)

Even the Whiteman is also portrayed to have great respect for their culture too in the context of the play. Clifford becomes irritated and feels the power of the rule Britannia is being trivialized by the Lagosians:

**GOVERNOR:** Over forty eight hours after my order, that conceited and ludicrously awkward African chief is still on his puny throne...See how little the might of Rule Britannia is being felt and feared in this pampered haven of fools! (p.78)

Many definitions of culture have been given earlier in this paper but cultural aesthetics is defined by Berleant (1991, p.22) as that:

Correlative study of the influences of social institutions, belief systems, and patterns of association and action that shape the life of human social animal and give that life meaning and significance. . . . It encompasses the typical qualities and configurations of color, sound, texture, light, movement, smell, taste, perpetual pattern, space, temporal sensibility, and size in juxtaposition with the human body, and the influence of traditional patterns of belief and practice on the creation and apprehension of these qualities.



While the society is always historio-cultural (history and cultural), the aesthetical value of such society depends on the psychological, historical and cultural views of the people. The cultural beauty showcased in the selected play include, language, songs, costumes, names etc. However, readers could also feel the impact of culture through the songs used in the play. For instance, the song and the chants used identify the situation in the play. For instance, Elet uOdibo narrates the future of Lagos as foretold by Ifa divination through chants:

Bi a ba n kifaunbo, a debii	When we chant that verse we get
to	
Ogagariga, awoEko	Ogagariga,diviner for Lagos,
Lo difafEkoo,	He divined for Lagos,
Ekofofere,	Eko eagerly desired
O Loun o joyeOluyebe	He wanted to be installed
Oluyebe...(27)	

In the above Ifa chant, Eko sacrificed all what he was required by ifa and he became the Oluyebe that he desired. Also, the Yoruba language used by the King portrays his pride in his mother tongue. This creates the gap that is filled by the interpreter between him and Governor Clifford. While he confirms his love for the mother tongue, he also expresses his primary aim of deceiving the white man who wants to trick him into what is not benefiting to his people.

**ELEKO:** How much English do I speak? English is his own mother tongue and he can ask the wrong question and make me say what I don't intend. I'll speak Yoruba and put the interpreter between us as an excuse to modify any statement later (p.9)

This implies that culture is a psychological phenomenon that inspires the member of a society to think and plan ahead for the unknown. It awakens the consciousness of man to prepare himself physically and emotionally for every task before him. Thus, Yerima (2015, p.135) reiterates that culture indeed is 'the totality of man's existence. It determines man's behaviour, beliefs and attitudinal patterns and how man wants to be related to in the past, present and future'. While language helps to build the characters and theme, the setting of the play is also more established as the name, songs and costumes used depict Lagos.

## Conclusion

While critics have criticized the meaning and essence of nationalist ideology, this paper concludes that nationalism to a large extent is a valuable ideology



that can help in curbing political vices in some nations. At the same time, this ideology can be a divisive one that makes individual differences so visible. Also, *Herbert Macaulay and the Spirit of Lagos* by Akinwumi Isola discusses a nationalist movement that is non-xenophobic, that allows freedom, liberty, tolerance, equality and individual rights to be achieved. However, Isola celebrates the togetherness and the spirit of oneness among the people of Lagos which have always helped them fight against most external forces.

### References:

- Andah, B.W (1982) "African Development in Cultural Perspective with Reference to Nigeria" Occasional publications of the Department of Archeology and Anthropology, University of Ibadan. Ibadan: University of Ibadan Press.
- Avruch, K. (1998) *Culture and conflict resolution*. Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace Press.
- Berleant, A. (1991) *Art and Engagement*. Illinois: University of Illinois Press.
- Driller, J. (2004). *Cultural diversity: A primer for the human services*. United Kingdom: Thomson Brooks/Cole.
- Esman, M. (1994) *Ethnic politics*. Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press
- Famade, O.A. (2001) *Sociological foundations of education*. Lagos: Pumark Nigeria Ltd
- Guibernau, M. (2001) *National identity and modernity in modern roots*. (Ed.) Alan Dieckhoff and Natividad Gutierrez. London: Polity Press.
- Hofstede, G. (1994) *Cultures and organizations: Software of the mind*. London: Harper Collins Business.
- Kellas, G. (1998) *The Politics of nationalism and ethnicity*, 2nd Ed. New York, NY: St. Martin's Press Inc.
- Orojide-Isola, A. (2009) *Herbert Macauley and the spirit of Lagos*. Ibadan: University press plc.
- Schein, E. (1990) *Organizational culture*. American Psychologist 45(2): 109–119.
- Smith, A. (1991) *National identity*. London: Penguin Books Ltd.
- Yerima, A. (2015) *Culture, drama and national ethos*. Ibadan: Ebony Books and Kreation