

Review

The paradox of nation and nationhood and the process of reconciliation in Bole Butake's *Family Saga*

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Accepted 12 November, 2012

This study addressed and captured the problem associated with the definition of a nation. It further demonstrated that the notion of nationhood in postcolonial Africa is unequivocally paradoxical; those who were on power had without any shame become dictators, tribalistic. They employed all forms of exploitative means to further colonize their citizens. This paper focused on the lack of patriotism and nationhood. However, it concluded with the fractured postcolonial Cameroonian nation built on historical circumstances; and it also presented metaphorically our playwright who tactfully proposed dialogue and reconciliation as a way forward. To buttress this argument, the tenets of postcolonial theory and new historicism will be employed.

Key words: Paradox, nation, nationhood, healing, reconciliation, postcolonial theory, new historicism, exploitation.

INTRODUCTION

Literature and society are inextricably interrelated. Society influences literature, so too does literature influence society. There is therefore a nexus between literature and society. Laursen and Swingewood (1972) in *The Sociology of Literature* underscore that:

As with sociology, literature too is pre-eminently concerned with man's social world, his adaptation to it, and his desire to change it. Thus the novel, as the major literary genre of industrial society, can be seen as a faithful attempt to re-create the social world of man's relation with his family, with politics, with the state; it delineates too his roles within the family and other institutions, the conflicts and tensions between groups and social classes (12).

It is therefore clear that no writer writes in a vacuum. The playwright under study is not an exception. He metaphorically focuses on the relationship between the Francophone Cameroon (East) and the Anglophone Cameroon (West). Sometimes nations are formed as a

result of different groups of people deciding to come together and form one in spite of their different cultural backgrounds. Ako (2009), in "What the gods and goddesses have put together: Writing the nation in Bole Butake's *Family Saga* (2005) and *Betrayal without Libation*", notes that most nations are made up of ethnic groupings with different cultures and languages which for various reasons decide to come together to form nation states (7). The situation that is presented to us here is quite different. This was not the case with some African countries¹. After several years of hard struggle through the spirit of nationalism, some African countries have got their independence.

Laughi Lam (2001) in *Reimagining The Nation State* confirms this in the following lines: "So far we have seen that nationalism historically was widely considered a

¹ This is because the European powers met at the Berlin Conference in 1884 and agreed amongst themselves to partition the Continent. For the case of Cameroon, when the 1st world war broke out, the allied forces of Britain and France invaded Cameroon and defeated the Germans. The League of Nations handed over Cameroon to France and Britain with a large portion given to France and a smaller part to Britain on 20th of July 1922.

welcome ideological development because it fostered territorial unification and helped cultivate a politics of national consensus” (94). This could be part of the reason why the English speaking and French speaking Cameroon decided to form one nation. This was done through President Ahidjo’s careful machinations. Ambanassom (2002) in Education of the Deprived has stated:

...And after careful manipulation of the population of the Federal Republic of Cameroon, Ahidjo successfully got Cameroonians to vote by 99.9 in favour of a unitary state rather than a federation, whereas only Anglophones had participated in the plebiscite that decided their fate on February 11, 1961. Under normal constitutional practices only Anglophones would have taken part in the 1972 referendum (20).

It should be understood that having accepted to live together as a nation did not altogether solve the problem. One part has always felt cheated by the other partner. Anderson (2006) in his Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism defines a nation as:

...an imagined political community ---and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of the community (141).

This is the idea that before independence the different groups had in their minds; that is the idea of oneness, solidarity and nationhood. But it is beyond that. The two nations live together though they are boiling; their smiles are built on hypocrisy. This confirms Clara (2001)’s viewpoint in Nation Because of Difference quoting Homi Bhabha that “Nation is defined as a unifying entity, and yet the various representations of the nation reveal division and disruption at strategic junctures so that the definition is rendered either meaningless or controversial”. This work seeks to address and capture the problem associated with the definition of a nation. It will further demonstrate that the notion of nationhood in postcolonial Africa is unequivocally paradoxical and controversial due to the fact that leaders on power have without any shame become dictators and tribalistic; they have employed all forms of exploitative means to colonize their citizens.

Once again, this paper shows that there is no sense of patriotism and nationhood. This falls in line with Roger (2009)’s point of view in Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the national question in the New Europe, when he argues that:

Most discussions of nationhood are discussions of nations. Nations are understood as real entities, as commodities, as substantial, enduring collectivities. That they exist is taken for granted, although how they exist and how they came to exist is much disputed (13).

This paper concludes with the fact that in spite of the fractured postcolonial Cameroonian nation built on historical circumstances, hypocrisy and presented metaphorically, our playwright, Bole Butake proposes dialogue and reconciliation as a way forward. To the author, it will be of absolute necessity to present an overview of *Family Saga*², before getting through the analysis and the argument.

THE ARGUMENT

Family Saga is divided into eight movements. Each of them is focused on a different aspect; but they all lead to a coherent and cohesive whole. In the first movement, we are introduced to Kamala and Kamalo, major characters in the play. They are in a conflictual situation connected to the provision of the state. Kamala thinks that kamalo is very greedy because he has not given his own share of the provision of the state. Kamala notes:

*Why are you so greedy? What happened to my own share of the provisions?
Why can't you ever be considerate?
How many times must I remind you that there are two people living on this estate?(8)*

These questions come up because Kamala thinks that he and his children have been neglected. Although Kamalo tries to justify this, he is not convinced. He rather accuses him and his children as being lazy. Kamala notes that Kamalo and his children spend their time doing nothing for the state. They are always in three- pieces- suit drinking and smoking. Redone is constantly drunk. Either he is drinking or he is already drunk and sleeping under the tree (9). Kamala and his children are not happy with the way the state resources are managed. There is thus no spirit of oneness. There is no sense of solidarity. While others are feeding fat in fattening partnership with those who have maintained them in power, others are languishing in abject poverty. The idea of the nation here is different from Anderson (2006)’s definition of a nation. The paradox of a nation here is further confirmed by Bhabha (2000) in Nation and Narration when he underscores that:

² Published in 2005 is a conflictual play that is aimed at engaging individuals and peoples with different ideologies and class situations to build up capacities that are intended to help them make sense of their world and positively change their conditions without necessarily going to war. See Hilarious Ngwa Ambe’s comment on *Family Saga*

Nations, like narratives, lose their origins in the myths of time and only fully realize their horizons in the mind's eye. Such an image of the nation – or nation – might seem impossibly romantic and excessively metaphorical, but it is from those traditions of political thought and literary language that the nation emerges as a powerful historical idea in the west. An idea whose cultural compulsion lies in the impossible unity of the nation as a symbolic force (1).

Kamalo and his children are part of those who have pushed the nation to a limping state. In their desperate state, Kamala and his children think that, they are only there to conceive while Kamalo and his children are there to execute. Kamala, with his postcolonial mind and without any fear, questions why he and his children have been transformed into slaves. In talking about postcolonial theory, Aschroft et al. (1989) intimate that:

Postcolonial theory involves discussion on experience of various kinds: migration, slavery, suppression, resistance, representation, difference, race, gender, place and responses to the influential master discourses of imperial cultures such as history, philosophy and linguistics (1-2).

Postcolonial theory therefore encloses much. It concerns all the societies which the imperial forces of Europe have touched even if not felt in the formal guise of theoretical texts (2). This theory therefore sets out to deconstruct what master discourses have laid down as parameters, value and writings of the colonized. In this case, it is about the marginalized lots. Over and above all, postcolonial theory has to do with the questioning of unjust power relationships. This explains why kamala and his children continue to question why they are not treated fairly in their supposed country. Those who think that they belong tend to mistreat the others. In this case, we are referring to Kamala and Kamalo (East and West Cameroons).

From the above analysis, it is evident that postcolonial theory has to do with the questioning of unjust power relationships. Attridge and Rose (1998) disclose that “Postcolonial writings desire to contest the power of the colonizer, and assert the authority of the oppressed subject” (8). Kamala and his children have all along been trying to find out why they are only there to execute the ideas of Kamalo and his papa. He further wishes to know who gave him the right to maltreat them. In his response, Kamalo underscores that his ‘Papa’ gave the right and he does not know why his father has abandoned him:

Is it my fault that your own papa has abandoned you? You are not even grateful that I took pity on you and brought you into this beautiful estate.

Ingrate. Always complaining. Always asking questions. According to the deed.... According to the agreement...(10)

Kamalo gives the impression that Kamala should not hold him responsible. He tells him that he should go and ask his own ‘Papa’ what is going wrong. Even with that, Kamala and his children still think that:

Every community of human beings is regulated. Without rules and contracts there is total chaos resulting in disagreements and unnecessary squabbles which will result in the wasting of our resources. Can't you see that? What makes you think my father abandoned me? And who is the ingrate between the two of us. This estate belongs to who? (11)

Kamalo still insists that his own ‘Papa’ has given him all the right to do what he thinks. For Kamala, this is some kind of provocation. Consequently, Kamala insults Kamalo. This is partly because he cannot think for himself. He does only what his ‘papa’ tells him. Kamalo goes ahead to tell kamala that he (Kamala) and his children belong to him and if he does not like it he should go elsewhere. In the following lines Kamalo declares: “You belong to me. That’s what my papa says. If you don’t like it here, you can go elsewhere. That’s what my papa says” (13). There is no sense of patriotism. This further contradicts Anderson’s idea of a nation. But it falls in line with Clara’s definition of a nation. Quoting Bhabha, she notes that: “a nation is defined as a unifying entity, and yet the various representations of the nation reveal division and disruption at strategic junctures so that the definition is rendered either meaningless or controversial” (57).

There are a lot of disagreements and meaningless claims between Kamala and Kamalo. Therefore, there is no sense of communion in this nation. This is where part of the paradox lies. This play is a metaphorical representation of the unholy relationship between the Anglophone and the Francophone. Even though they are living together, the Anglophones feel cheated and marginalized. This confirms the view that the nation is constituted of the very conflicting views that it seeks to overcome. The Anglophones are always complaining. The two Cameroons are represented by Kamalo and Kamala. Kamala thinks that the term of the contract that they have signed has not been respected. He goes further to ask for the deed of brotherhood that they signed. To show that there is a lot of disagreements between them, Kamalo thinks that they have signed a deed of bondage hood. This is what pushes Kamala to regret why he has signed the deed. This complaint has given rise to much literature by Anglophone writers. It has and continues to serve as raw material for most of Cameroon Anglophone writings.

Butake (1993) in "Social (in) justice as the Breeding – ground of protest writing" notes that "...the absence of social justice and equal opportunities for all in Cameroon, and more especially for Anglophone Cameroonians, has given birth to protest writing"(154). The lack of social justice breeds serious complaint which serves as productive material for emerging writings. With a confused state of mind, Kamala decides to meet Baakingoom the supposed father to find out whether he gave him freedom or bondagehood. Baakingoom does not seem to know the difference between brotherhood and bondagehood. But what is clear is that Kamala and his children have been marginalized. Their father's idea to search for their own 'papa' is out of frustration and dehumanization. While kamalo is living in an air conditioned home, eating, drinking, smoking and merry making, he is toiling in the field with his children. This pushes Kamala to try to find out from Baakingoom the terms of the contract that they have signed. He underlines that:

What were the terms of this deed of brotherhood or bondagehood with Kamalo? He tells me that his role is to conceive while mine is to execute. In short, I am his slave, toiling in the fields from dawn to dusk in these rags while he is having air-conditioning at home in a three piece suit, eating and drinking and smoking and making merry(22).

Kamala, as earlier indicated, has a postcolonial mind. He attempts to question why they have been marginalized in a set up where they ought to have the same rights. Being inquisitive falls within the tenets of postcolonial theory. Its focus has to do with questioning unjust power relationships. It is through this conversation that Kamala realizes that Baakingoom is not his father and Kamalo's 'papa' is not his papa. In a conversation between Kamalo and Sawa, Sawa in an intelligent manner still presents their perennial problem. She tells Kamalo that where they live is very hot, mosquitoes invested area, leaking roof, and the harvest is always very heavy (26). Sawa thinks that there is something wrong somewhere. She emphasizes that "the harvest is always very heavy na? I don't know what farther does with all the crops we harvest all the time na. Uncle you will make him to build our own house too, na?" (26). This excerpt shows that Sawa and her family are living in abject poverty because of mismanagement. This nation is so poorly managed that there is no hope. Discrimination and injustice have perverted the society. Sawa thinks that if Kamalo conceives and Kamala only executes, then that is an unjust role. Who made it? It is a master and slave rule. 'That's why you're living in a very beautiful house only eating and drinking---while we are toiling in the fields for your enjoyment'(30).

This is an indication of division that exists between the citizens of this imaginary nation. Breitingner (1993) in

Language, Literature, Cultural Identity: alternative views about Marginalization confirms that "Although government has set a whole team of intellectuals at work to design a natural cultural policy and identity... the essence of Cameroonness has remained vague" (154). The union is still shaky. It is built on mutual distrust. Kamala and his children are living a bewildered life. Their home is empty and shattered. This explains why they are dejected and disillusioned. They are living an unfulfilled life. This bewilderment has pushed Ngong to ask a number of questions. He wishes to know the kind of agreement that was signed and the other party is so insensitive to any sense of morality (34). He further underlines that the agreement they signed is so obviously disregarded and even violated by one of the parties. This rather helps to fragment Ngong and his parents. There is unity in disunity. The sense of nationhood is farfetched. The idea here is so controversial. Even though they are so dejected because they are marginalized, Kamala continues to reassure them and makes them understand that, the fight will continue. Kamala says:

My children, stop lamenting. I am still here. And while I am alive we will continue the struggle for justice. Kamalo cannot get away with this ...this... fraud and immorality...So you see, we have to prepare our minds for the great task ahead of us. Lamenting will solve nothing. It is time for us to put our heads together in order to face the faceless enemy (55).

Kamala, Sawa and Ngong are in a state of uncertainty. When they sit in their dejected state, they are involved in serious thinking. Their thoughts have to do with the re-imagination of the nation. Kamala as earlier indicated thinks that they are being used. That is not the pact they signed. He underscores that it has been faked. This is where the paradox lies. The guard who is in support of Kamalo summarizes Kamala's family problems in the following lines:

*We rape your daughter
We seized your goods
We turn you into slaves
To toil for the future of Kamalo
To sweat for the amusement of his papa (43).*

Consequently, Kamala and his children do not think that they are part of this nation. Kamalo and his papa have wasted the country's resources thus making the citizens poor. But Ngong thinks that they are responsible for their problems. This is partly because they are doing nothing to regain their liberty and dignity that Kamalo and his papa have taken away from them. What seems to bring antagonism between them is lack of dialogue. There is no sense of connectivity. This fragmented relationship has pushed some writers to be considered as champions of

the Anglophone course. Yenshu (1996) in *Literature in the Anglophone Cameroon and the African Context: Towards A Sociology of Cameroon Anglophone writing* comments that:

The stage in the development of this literature has been the transformation of the writer into a champion of Anglophone values. This has been prompted by the experience of cohabitation with the French –speaking community. Here literature is not only used as a means of satire for decrying the abuses of a French-speaking elite vis-à-vis an English –speaking elite. More often this is extrapolated to mean the oppression of the English –speaking Cameroonian by the French-speaking Cameroonians (107).

This falls within the realms of Butake's conception here. He has metaphorically presented the Anglophone Cameroonian plight vis –à –vis his Francophone counterpart. In this union, the Anglophone is the loser. The Anglophone is only oppressed and depersonalized. This is partly because the truth does not prevail. But, there is a need to continue to educate the masses so that the idea of a nation in the real sense could be re-imagined. This explains why Butake proposes dialogue rather than going to war to redress the situation between the Anglophone and the Francophone. To talk about the role of the writer in relation to his people, Butake in *Key note Address: The writer as Visionary (1996)* underlines that:

The writer, therefore, has a moral duty to steer members of his society along a course that ensures the triumph of truth and justice for all. Some people may ask, what truth? What justice? As indeed, they have often asked. While it may be true that people living in an age of extreme decadence and gross moral depravity may have difficulties distinguishing right from wrong because of the deliberate misplacement of values , there is no doubt that the bottom-line of it all is one's conscience (23).

Butake thinks that the most important thing is not to take arms and go to war. This explains why he proposes dialogue as a solution. In a different sphere, the differences and the continued depersonalization of the Anglophone represented by Kamala and his children would have led to conflicts.

THE WAY FORWARD

Most discussions of nationhood are discussions of nations; nations are understood as entities, as communities, as substantial, enduring collectivities. That

they exist is taken for granted, although how they exist and how they came to exist is much disputed (Rogers, 2009). The idea here is that the notion of the nation is built on hypocrisy. The way the members of the communities live is not much of anybody's business. Consequently differences must be kept aside so that the imagined community should move forward. This is part of the author's concern.

Kamala and his children have come to realize that there is nothing they can do. This is partly because they have no arms and they cannot also resign to fate. The only thing they can do is to dialogue with Kamalo and his papa. This is Butake's commitment to solve the problem between Kamalo and Kamala without bloodshed. This explains why he tactfully creates a forum in which Kamala and his children will present their problems to Kamalo and they try to solve them. Kamala and his children decide to sit together and harmonize their problems so that they could present them to Kamalo when he comes. Note should be taken of the fact that, Kamala and his children have been asked to prepare songs for the entertainment of Kamalo when he comes to visit them. It is true that each of them have their problems. That of poverty, hunger, lack of discussion with Kamalo, bad management and no identity (50). We realize that all of them have basically the same problems. In trying to solve their problem through dialogue and reconciliation, Ngong thinks that, it is the power of knowledge. Moreover, in going to have knowledge about their family history is also good. This explains why he appreciates their father's effort for what he has given them. He states that:

Knowledge is power! Father, of all the things that you have ever done for us, this is the best. Going out to look for the story of our family has been the best school that we have gone to. Good people, the best inheritance that you can give your children is giving them education, information (60).

Kamala realizes that, education has done them much good. He maintains that:

my dear children, good people, now I know that the easiest way to make someone your slave is to deny that person knowledge. To deny that person an identity. To deny that person the story of his roots, his origin (61).

Kamala explains to his children that is what Kamalo tried to do to him. They finally compose their song which goes thus 'in one family, in one family, we can change the world' (61). This is part of the song that will be presented to Kamalo and his 'papa'. This will definitely have an impact on him and his father. This song has been proposed by Ngong and they have all accepted. It means

that if Kamala and Kamalo sit together they can both conceive and execute. What it implies is that, they need to dialogue to move this nation forward. When Kamalo finally comes, the storey teller briefs him on the history of Kamanda and when the song is presented to him. He feels so touched and (Kamalo) suddenly reacts. He apologizes for all the wrong things that he has done against his brother. He explains that:

Nothing can be hidden from the face of the sun.
History can never be changed or forgotten.
The truth, at last, has come out
Cursed be the day I saw the light
To have been so evil to my own brother
To have committed these abominations
Against my niece, my daughter
The offspring of my dear twin brother (82).

This testimony has on the other hand satisfied Kamala and his children. This is confirmed by Ngong when he notes that "it is enough that you have realized that you were in error and that you are very sorry for your terrible acts against your own brother and us your children" (8). This makes them happy. This ought to be the spirit that should reign amongst them and help this nation to develop. Disagreement rather leads to underdevelopment. Kamalo has realized it himself. This is made clear when he notes that 'I wronged you most ignominiously by using my brought force on you. Now I agree with you that the force of argument is better' (83).

In realizing himself and conversing with his niece and nephew, it shows reconciliation. He describes himself as "an ignoble vampire who should be uprooted and burnt in the deepest furnace" (84). This shows the intense feeling of disgrace and heartlessness with which he treated his own fellow brother and his children. This in order words is an indication of the dehumanized treatment that is continuously meted on the Anglophone Cameroonians. To further show signs of reconciliation, he proposes that "henceforth, we must join hands and minds and hearts and the resources of this estate for our own good, our own prosperity" (84). This is part of the ideas behind a nation and nationhood but it is still based on controversy Kamala and his children have always longed for this. Above all, he tells kamala that:

I now know that I have behaved worse than an animal towards my brother and my children. The ancestors and our dear mother, the Goddess Kamanda, forgive my baseness. Brother, tune the song about one family. From today it will be our rallying call, our anthem in the land of kamanda (85).

This shows that the process of reconciliation and healing is complete. Butake's objective in presenting this episode is to educate the two Cameroons to embrace each other

each other. But this is just a figment of the imagination. In spite of all these efforts, things have not really changed.

Conclusion

This paper sought to address and capture the problem associated with the definition of a nation. It has demonstrated that, the idea of 'nation' and 'nationhood' in postcolonial Africa is unequivocally paradoxical and controversial due to the fact that those who will power have without any shame become dictators, tribalistic and have employed all forms of exploitative means to further colonize their citizens. This paper has further shown that, there is no sense of patriotism and nation-ness. Above all, in spite of the fractured postcolonial Cameroonian nation built on historical circumstances, hypocrisy and presented metaphorically, our playwright (Bole Butake) has rather tactfully proposed dialogue and reconciliation as a way forward. To the author, this is only a figment of the imagination partly because the rulers think their leadership is a birth right. Instead of living in harmony as most imagined nations around the world, this nation has its roots in fear, suspicion and hatred of the other. This makes Cameroon and Africa as a world not respected at the international level. This falls in line with Membe (2001)'s view in *On the postcolony* that: "It is this elementary and primitiveness that makes Africa the world par excellence of all that is incomplete, mutilated, and unfinished; its history reduced to a series of setbacks of nature in its quest for mankind" (1). This, to the author, makes a nation a social and territorial construct. It is generally marred by hatred and suspicion. Note should be taken of the fact that, dialogue, reconciliation should be our watch word. However, the idea of the nation and the advocacy of various nationalisms have somehow offered the marginalized lots the imaginative resources to question the authority of those who will have power.

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