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**Inter-Ethnic Marriage as an Ingredient for Coexistence in a  
multicultural Society: Elechi Amadi's *Woman of Calabar* as a  
Paradigm**

**Nwafor, Friday, Ph.D.**

Department of Theatre and Film Studies

Faculty of Humanities

University of Port Harcourt

P.M.B 5323, Port Harcourt

Rivers State, Nigeria

E-mail: [Friday.nwafor@uniport.edu.ng](mailto:Friday.nwafor@uniport.edu.ng)

**Abstract**

Nigeria is made up of over 250 ethnic nationalities and each of these groups is further divided into smaller sub-groups. Mistrust, greed and envy amongst others are responsible for the aggression, hatred and bitterness that have characterized her day to day experiences. This paper is motivated by the need to interrogate the ingredients that have sustained the continued coexistence of the different ethnic nationalities in spite of her multicultural nature. Adopting the integral humanism theoretical framework, this paper identified intermarriage as a major factor that has contributed to the continued search for unification instead of separation in the face of religious and cultural differences as exemplified in Elechi Amadi's *Woman of Calabar*. The analytic approach and the qualitative research methodology were adopted in this paper.

**Introduction**

Humanity is froth with complex relationships that appears to separate mankind in one instance and bind the same group in the next. The creation of local, regional and global boundaries has ushered in issues of group identification even when in one locality. According to the Unitarian Universalist Association:

Multiculturalism means nurturing a religious community where people of all races, ethnicities, and cultures see their cultural identities reflected and affirmed in every aspect of congregational life – worship, fellowship, leadership,

governance, religious education, social justice, etc. Multiculturalism means that we create religious homes where encounters between people of different cultural identities intersect with Unitarian universalism to create a fully inclusive community where, in the words of a vision statement adopted by the Unitarian Universalist Association's (UUA) Leadership Council, "all people are welcomed as blessings and the human family lives whole and reconciled (p. 65).

Multiculturalism is a concept that promotes coexistence amongst ethnic nationalities with different cultural, political and social policies. It is the foundation of social integration, cultural assimilation and racial segregation. It has been described as a "salad bowl" cultural mosaic and melting pot respectively. There is argument on the appropriation of multiculturalism as a way of dealing with diversity and immigrant integration. Geoffrey Brahm Levy (2012) submitted that there is rather an attempt by interculturalists to supplant multiculturalists.

There are different positions on the status of Nigeria as a multicultural or heterogeneous nation. According to Johnson (2015),

The concept has continued to raise a lot of issues in modern days, because instead of unity, multiculturalism is diversifying a country from its primary goal. Given that some groups have more mobilization than others. The question is what about the national unity that they all belong? It focuses more on depoliticizing deference and these issues differ from one society with another. In some societies, the issue may be on language and in some others, it may be political, social and economic as the case may be (p.4)

The nature of Nigeria state has continued to bring about questions like the question of federal character and its interpretation in the appointment of political office holders. The primary aim of the founding fathers has been totally eroded due to the clamour for power. Okodo (2007) in Asike and Awuluora (2017, p. 6) asserted that:

Demographic statistics show that Nigeria is a complex country of over 160 million people with many values within it. In fact, the expanse of land that is today called Nigeria was inhabited by different ethnic groups, each of which has a status of a kingdom or nation. They are endowed with different natural economic opportunities. This is what the Europeans discovered and decided to explore the areas for their own benefits

The different ethnic groups sometimes with different kingdoms within the same ethnic group are endowed differently and the struggle to control the resources in the Niger Delta is exactly the interest of the colonialists. They used every means to force the different tribes to trade with them at prices they detected using force not minding all the differences. According to Uwalaka (2003):

By the time of amalgamation, the British did not call the nations with which it had treaty for consultation. Britain did not consult with the Oyo's, the Egba's, the Efik's, the Igbo's, the Ibadan's, the Bini's, the Tiv's, Olorin's, the Sokoto Caliphate. Britain used its military power to bring together the incompatible (p. 7).

Achebe cited by Nwodo (2004, p.147) argued that "there is nothing basically wrong with Nigerian character...the Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise

to the responsibility of true leadership”. In spite of the incompatibility expressed in some quarters, there were Nigerians who rather than pursue regional, political, religious, ethnic, tribal interests believed in exploiting the benefits of Nigeria’s heterogeneity. Notable nationalists who fought tirelessly for the independence of Nigeria were Herbert Macaulay, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, Sir Ahmadu Bello and Chief Anthony Enahoro. They suffered severally in the hands of the colonists and detractors but their dreams came through by 1960. The Union Jack came down for the Green white Green flag to go up indicating a new dawn for Nigeria. This did not last for too long according to Uwazuluike (p.7) who argued that the British did not return to find out if the different ethnic groups were ready to co-habit as a nation. The incompatibles could not agree and this led to the Biafra war he said.

Maduka (1994, pp. 6 & 7) expresses how remarkable it is for Denmark in spite of her small population to have had concession to stand alone and the peaceful breakup of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia yet all we have “inherited is the idea of territorial integrity from our colonial masters without matching it up with the recognition of the inalienable rights of people to determine their destiny” (p.7). He insisted that “Nigeria is a pot-pourri of peoples with divergent and conflicting interests. It is a nation without nationals, a country without patriots. It is yet to be created”. Johnson (2015) in his own part posited that:

By natural endowment Nigeria has continued to enjoy her multiculturalists’ status and this has manifested in the way the people socialize, worship and run their governments. This political structure, a multi-party based is controlled by the larger ethnic groups who are the majority (the Igbos, Hausas and the Yorubas). The minority suffers the problem of personal identity, inadequate promotion of culture and poor representation in government (p.1)

The researcher interrogated issues around the multicultural nature of Nigeria in order to situate the ways in which inter-ethnic marriage has played the role of integration and not disintegration in *Woman of Calabar* by Elechi Amadi using Pandit Deen Dayal Upadhyaya’s theory of Integral Humanism. Wikipedia (2019) defined Integral Humanism as:

a philosophical and scientific thought development by Pandit Deen Dayal Upadhyaya and adopted by the Jana Sangh in 1965 as its official philosophy. It aims to appeal to broad section of India society by presenting an indigenous development model that puts human identity at its centre

Swarajya Staff (2016), in discussing “The Relevance of Integral Humanism in Modern Times” explained that it is a critic of both communism and capitalism. He states that the search for an integrated and sustainable model of development presents Pandit Deen Dayal’s “Integral Humanism” as an alternative. According to him “Integral Humanism” extends democracy and freedom from being merely political to social and economic as well. According to him, Integral Humanism supports diversity by doing away with the one size fits all approach of other models. It is an ideal model for country like India with its unique history, diversity and cultural ethos”. One of the ways Swarajya says Deen Dayalji’s philosophy can be implemented is Artha-neeti-Policies and Principles that can balance the use of labour, natural resources and capital so that we can provide a life of dignity to every human being.

Ozumba (2014) explained that Integrative Humanism is “a philosophy and method of doing philosophy. It has its philosophical, scientific, psychological, spiritual, Christian, electronic, and African roots. It is a philosophy with omniphiloric and ominiscientific applications.

Igwe (2018) also states in an interview on “Humanism and its Possibility in Africa” that: Integrative Humanism can be applied in all areas of disciplinary endeavour. According to him;

Humanist ideas could also be helpful in eliminating ritual killing and beliefs... humanism could help in eradicating the persecution of witches in the region... Humanist values could help end or at least drastically reduce the scale of religious extremism, violence, and bloodletting in the region. Since independence, Nigeria has witnessed too many cases of religious conflicts and carnage mainly in the Northern part of the country. Religious fanatics agitating for Sharia or protesting the visit of a Christian evangelist, or the alleged desecration of their holy book indulged in wanton killing and destruction of lives. Some people practiced their faith in such a way that they valued their religion, the sacred text, tradition or dogma more than human lives. Humanist ideas could be used in correcting this twist and imbalance between religiosity and reason, faith in a deity and value for humanity. ([www.Opinionnigeria](http://www.Opinionnigeria))

Johnson outlined the following as solutions for a better multicultural Nigeria: Developing and promoting policies of the minority interest, forming government from the grass root level, appointment of leadership roles to all ethnic groups, execution of national projects across all ethnic groups, educating the youths on the need for integration and freedom of religious practice respectively.

### **The Woman of Calabar - Synopsis**

*The Woman of Calabar* is a play based on the story about the city of Calabar as a notorious haven for “beautiful bewitching ladies”, who truly know how to “service” and retain their lovers, especially those not from the town. Eme, an Ikwerre born 24-year-old surveyor on National Youth Service in Calabar hooks up with beautiful Adia a young Efik girl and the love-bird’s co-habitation stirs up crises in the once peaceful families of Adia in Calabar and Eme in Port Harcourt.

Against all attempts including the dispatch by Eme’s family in Port Harcourt of his uncle with charms to stop him from continuing the relationship and Adia’s parents’ constant recall of their daughter from Eme’s house, the relationship continues to wax stronger.

In the end, Eme’s parents arrives Calabar determined to wrestle their son from the love entanglement believing that it is not ordinary. Eme’s parents arrive Adia’s home with the intention to sever the relationship once and for all only to discover that both mothers were school mates in high school. They recount their age long relationship. Eme and Adia finally secure the approval to marry from their parents.

### **Promotion of Inter-ethnic Marriage in the Play by Elechi Amadi**

Drama, poetry, and prose are aspects of literary devices used by writers to convey ideas that could easily be accepted to be true.

Our writers have ceaselessly pointed out that Nigeria is a conglomeration of ethnic groups which are yet to come together to form a nation. Chinua Achebe, Chukwuemeka Ike and Cyprian Ekwensi have used the theme of marriage to dramatise the point. Contracting marriages is a sphere of human experience that reveals the degree of readiness of a group to assimilate elements that are alien to it. The author’s portrayal of the couples shows that each ethnic group fights hard to preserve its purity by

preventing its sons and daughters from choosing their partners outside the group (Maduka, 1994: p. 8)

The play drawn partly from real life as explained by the playwright is yet another contribution of marriage in the unity of Nigeria. This time, the playwright is advancing the readiness of two ethnic groups to come together in marriage. Elechi Amadi choose to draw his characters from two minority groups namely, Calabar and Ikwerre without minding the perception about the ladies from the former as capable of using love potion to retain any man of their choice.

The joy of Eme's return from Oyo where he has just concluded his training as a surveyor is short lived by the news that he has been posted to Calabar. The same city Eme's uncle Wodike died while living with a mistress. Maduka (1994: p.9) draws attention to a song popular with the primary school children in multi-ethnic urban areas

Kalaba idiankpo

Ibo play wayo

Awusa begi-begi

Yoruba shit for pot

According to him,

Kalaba" in popular imagination stands for the Efik and the Ibibio; in the song, it evokes the Calabar woman notorious for her love potion – whenever a young man plans to settle down in Cross River or Akwa Ibom he is advised to guard against the activities of the femme fatale who can prepare special delicacies for him in order to enslave him and eventually disorient him in life (p.9).

Now Mrs. Akrika's only son Eme has not written for four months even after she wrote four times. Information has it that he is living with a mistress and the memory of the circumstance in which her brother Wodike died in Calabar makes the situation tense. Mrs. Akrika's hysteria forces her husband Mr. Akrika, Eme's father to agree on sending Eme's uncle Acho to Calabar.

Mrs. Akrika: Listen Acho, you were in Burma when my only brother Wodike died (Amadi, 2002, p. 20).

Acho: Yes, I got a letter reporting his death.

Mrs. Akrika: Were you told how he died? (p.21)

Acho: I don't remember.

Mrs. Akrika: He died in Calabar while living with a mistress. He was trading between Aba and Calabar. For a while he wrote regularly. Then suddenly he stopped. For nearly six months we did not hear from him. We discovered he was living with a mistress. At a family meeting we tried to persuade him to take a wife from home. His reaction was so violent that I suspected that something was seriously amiss. My father went to a seer who divined that Wodike's mistress was a witch and was holding him under a powerful spell. The seer promised to help but gave up when according to him, the woman and other witches tried to strangle him at night

The account explains the reason for Mrs. Akrika's apprehension and Acho's acceptance to take the trip the following day with a charm from Mrs. Akrika to administer in Eme's house so as to drive away Adia permanently.

Mrs. Akrika: Acho, I am not taking any chances. These are from a powerful dibia. When you get there mark this chalk across the doorway. This will ensure that whenever she leaves the house to see her people she will not come back. This gourd contains a powder. Blow it into the living room. She will become so uncomfortable that she will eventually pack out on her own (p. 22).

Olanrewaju et al (2017) argued that civil war, agitation for state creation, federal character principle, revenue allocation, ethno-religious crisis, rotational presidency, zoning and recently, terrorism and national conference are all products of multiculturalism and Elechi Amadi's Woman of Calabar in the character of Mrs. Akrika is acting out her fears in line with that.

Acho, Eme's uncle arrives in Calabar to meet Adia alone in his nephew's house. He is given an extra ordinary reception by Adia. Though convinced that she is a good girl, he administers the charm as instructed by Mrs. Akrika just as he is left alone by Adia to prepare lunch for him. Acho performs all the routines he is sent to do, he engages Adia and Eme individually and collectively only to find out that there is nothing binding them other than genuine love. The dialogue below suggests so:

Eme: ... Now tell me, having seen her, do you consider her dangerous? (p.31)

Acho: Certainly not. But Eme, a girl friend is different from a wife. Do you intend to marry her?

Eme: Having stayed overnight with us, I believe you can answer that question.

Acho: (Rising, pacing and nodding) yes, Eme I can answer the question. Adia is an angel of a girl, but ironically your marrying her could kill your mother. I have never seen her so tense and miserable (p.32)

On Acho's return, he makes it clear to Mrs. Akrika that Adia is not a witch and that the charm he took to Calabar is of no effect on her. He explains that she is the best girl Eme could possibly marry. The playwright exemplifies in the character of Acho the possibility of finding individuals in Nigeria who are able to assess others based on their characters and not ethnic leaning or mere perception. According to Acho "She is simply an angel of a girl"

Mrs Akrika: (Staring at Acho in disbelief and nodding her head in anguish) Oh God, the same circle of disaster again. That was exactly what Wodike said. He had met an angel and then the angel killed him. What have I done? Oh God, what have I done? (p.36)

The arrival and dispatch of Gloria, Eme's sister to Calabar to force Adia out of the house becomes another hope for Mrs. Akrika, Gloria promises to execute her plans successfully without causing any troubles. She arrives in Calabar, pretending to be in support of the relationship between Eme and Adia. She plants a letter in the pocket of Eme's cloth Adia is going to wash.

Adia: (Searching the pockets) I hope I'll find some money. Last time I found one pound (She finds the letter). Hello, what's this? A letter? I shouldn't read his letter

really. But this is a girl's writing. Perhaps Gloria's. God forgive me, but I must read it. I can't resist. (She reads silently and rubs her eyes in disbelief. She reads again, this time audibly). My sweet one, the other day you were fantastic. I am expecting you today as you promised. (p.43)

Adia: (Adia throws down the letter, paces round twice, then goes berserk. She throws the shirts away, pushes down the plates on the dining table, slaps her lap and bares her palms heavenwards, then she screams and collapses on the seat sobbing uncontrollably) Eme my first man! Eme my only man! Eme my dream! Death where are you? I say death, where are you? (She rushes into the living room. Presently, she rushes out with a bag and proceeds to pack her belongings into it untidily. Enter Gloria) (p.44)

Adia packs out of Eme's house and Gloria feels fulfilled although she pretends ignorance of the author of the letter before Adia. Her real mission and satisfaction are expressed thus:

Gloria: Silly, stupid girl. Yes, I have got her! I have got her! If she thought she could hijack my innocent brother just like that I think she knows better now. If that is the way to marry, I should have been married ten times by now. Which young man will not welcome a young and willing girl as a live-in lover? She is just a prostitute, plain and simple. (Mimicking her) May I call you sisi? What will you drink? Idiot, I have thought her a lesson she will never forget. (Mimicking) Eme darling, Eme darling, let me have your clothes for washing (Pointing at the door) Washer woman bye-bye, and don't come... (There is a knock. Gloria quickly sits down calmly) yes come in (Eme enters).

Gloria relates pretentiously how she tried to restrain Adia from packing but she insists on leaving. Eme not believing that Adia will leave without any cause as explained by Gloria his sister goes in search of her but could not find her even in her home. Adia's return to pick her earrings and subsequent meeting with Eme and his friend Felix provides an opportunity for the letter to be read. The letter reads:

Felix: (Reading slowly and clearly) my sweet one, the other day you were fantastic. I am expecting you today as you promised.

Yours sweetheart,

As usual (p.49)

The playwright again provides another opportunity for the continued coexistence of the duo, Eme and Adia, by creating an atmosphere for the study of the letter side by side with another authored by Gloria. This convinces all the parties that Gloria is the mastermind of the plot.

Felix: (Moving closer to Adia) Look at the tails of the Y in both letters. Okay? Observe the belly of the B, right? See how the F is crossed nearer the top of the letter. Look at the head of the P, How it is separated from the main body (Drawing back and putting the two letters at arm's length) Now survey the two letters generally. (p.50)

Adia: (Studying the letter intently, finally she looks up with tears in her eyes. She sobs and hugs Eme tightly.) I am sorry, very very sorry darling.

Eme: It is not your fault. Gloria is to blame. I shall deal with her.

News of the return of Adia to Eme's house after Gloria's visit could not be contained by Mrs. Akrika who reinstates her belief thus:

Mrs. Akrika: Papa Eme, how many times will I tell you that this is not an ordinary love affair? There are powerful supernatural agents at work. But listen to me everybody, I shall travel to Calabar on Monday, I shall get my son off the grip of this witch whatever it takes. (p. 52)

Mr. and Mrs. Akrika arrives Eme's house in Calabar and meet Adia at home while Eme is away on tour. Adia makes all efforts to show love to Eme's parents by offering them some drinks but Mrs. Akrika will not accept her even when her husband is already impressed with her offer of a beer and plans to prepare them lunch. She insists that Adia must leave but Adia explains that she can't abandon the house left in her care. Again Mr. Akrika sees sense in Adia's insistence on waiting until Eme returns. On Eme's return, his mother drags him and Adia to Adia's parents' home to register how her son cannot marry their daughter. Mrs. Akrika not ready to share any pleasantries with Mr. Ekpenyong, Adia's father fires the first shot:

Mrs. Akrika: it is about your daughter who is hanging around our son. We want her to leave him alone. (p.4)

Mr. Ekpenyong: (Smiling) Hm, I don't know who is hanging around whom. The fact is, each time we bring back our daughter here, your son sneaks in and takes her away.

Just on time, Mrs. Ekpenyong arrives and on seeing Eme; (p.65)

Mrs. Ekpenyong: (Pointing at Eme) You again? Won't you leave our daughter alone? (Moves menacingly towards him and her husband restrains her).

Mr. Ekpenyong starts an introduction of the visitors and before he could finish;

Mr. Ekpenyong: And this is Mrs. Akrika (The two women, shake hands, stare at each other and freeze)

Mrs. Akrika: You were Nora Essien, not so?

Mrs. Ekpenyong: And were you not Deborah Weje?

Mrs. Akrika: (Loudly) Sparkles

Mrs. Ekpenyong: Bubbles! (The two women embrace passionately. They pull apart, stare at each other and embrace again)

Mrs. Akrika: Sparkles!

Mrs. Ekpenyong: Bubbles! (Adia and Eme exchange glances. Akrika and Ekpenyong look surprised). How are you? My God! How many years now? 25perhaps?

Mrs. Akrika: Not less. Papa Eme meet Nora my best friend at Elelenwo Girls School. (p.66)

Mr. Akrika: (Surprised) This is miraculous. Mrs. Ekpenyong my wife has told me so much about you. For instance, how the principal caught both of you drinking garri by midnight while sweating for your maths exam the following morning. (They laugh)



Mrs. Ekpenyong: And you know, we ran away so fast that we were sure she had not recognized us. When we thought we were safe in our dormitory I realized i had left my maths book behind!

Mrs. Akrika: And with your name in it!

Mrs. Ekpenyong: Yes o-o (More laughter)

Mrs. Akrika: Sparkles, so Adia is your daughter.

Mrs. Ekpenyong: Yes-o

Mrs. Akrika: (Rather sadly) Chei! I have been hard on the poor girl. Adia come (Adia goes to her) You must forgive me my dear. (Admiring her) Sparkles, what a pretty daughter you have: your exact picture 25 years ago. (Hugs her. She whispers to her and Adia giggles) You will be my daughter in-law wont you?

Adia: Yes mama. (She hugs Eme. Akrika and Ekpenyong shake hands and then hug each other).

The action above makes it clear that both Mrs. Akrika and Mrs. Ekpenyong, mothers of Adia and Eme have approved the union between the love birds. The bias or hate due to existing ethnic perception by both parents is dropped by the two women as a result of their relationship in high school. This union of course will definitely promote the relationship between the two ethnic nationalities. Apart from the game of football, that provides a temporary environment of unity among all peoples of the world irrespective of colour, tribe or religion, marriage is another very serious and permanent ingredient in the unification of any multicultural group all over the world. By the time marriages are consummated among marriageable youngsters and they begin to have children, certainly the relationship or bonding is widened. Kolawole (2009) asserted that:

I have seen enough in Nigeria to know that it is not somebody's "tribe and tongue" that matters but what they have to offer. If a leader is doing well in office Nigerians hardly discuss the sectional issues. I know in my heart of heart that what Nigerians need is a leader that can make things happen – the real issue is not North, South, man or woman, Ijaw or Fulani. We know this very well. We only pretend not to know because of political sentiment. (p. 5)

Conclusively, though mistrust, greed and envy amongst others between the different tribes are responsible for the aggression, hatred and bitterness that have characterized Nigeria's day to day experiences, Elechi Amadi uses the play to correct yet another patriarchal construct that sees the use of talisman by only women in matters of relationship. He allows the female character to express her real personality to everyone that comes her way without any selfish attachment. Although, he built the conflict around female characters in the play (Mrs. Akrika, Gloria and Mrs. Ekpeyong), he resolves it with them as well. There was no time in the play where Eme's father openly condemned the coming together of the love birds but continued to say that things will work out itself over time.

Elechi Amadi has demonstrated that marriage is still a tool that knows no boundaries with *The Woman of Calabar*. Ebele (2014) states that:

Adia is an unusual heroine who seems to escape the tragedy and punishment of many young lovers in the classics, Western and African literatures. Unlike Juliet in *Romeo*

and Juliet and Ogwoma in *Wedlock of the Gods*, Adia's desire for passion is fully met and even rewarded with marriage, despite the challenges of prejudices and bitter experiences (p. 231)

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