

Nigeria: Social Identities and the Struggle for Survival

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Abstract

In the wake of unending interpersonal and group conflicts and the recurrent xenophobic attacks between groups in different parts of Nigeria, this paper explores the social-psychological perspectives to understanding group differences. The word multifaceted describes the social identities of Nigerians. Nigerians are people with multiple social identities which contribute to the definitions of who they are. Such definitions are enmeshed in the history of how ethnic, political and religious affiliations have provoked conflict in the past and in the present in a bid for group survival. Existential needs; the clamour for individual and group survival are implicated in the disunity in the country. With a deviation from the traditional theoretical approach to understanding group behaviours, this paper analyses the causes of group conflicts in the country within the context of indigenous Yoruba proverbs. Yoruba proverbs are explored as the philosophies which tell the values and peculiar experiences of a people and provide a script for daily living. Furthermore, the paper addresses historical and social-psychological factors that maintain group enmity and the implication of such for social cohesion and national development. On a final note, the paper makes recommendations on how to engender peace, cohesion and justice in the nation still leaning on the richness of proverbs and other avenues to ensure social inclusion for all groups.

Keywords: *social identity, national development, Yoruba proverbs, group survival, social cohesion.*

The Concept of Identity: Its Multifaceted Nature

Individual differences in behaviour, feelings, beliefs, attitudes and physiology are at the core of the field of psychology. The reality that no two persons share the same characteristics inspired the study of human behaviour. Such differences also extend to differences in human units in the world ranging from family, peer groups, community to nations. Differences between human beings have produced positive consequences such as inspiring positive social change and innovations. However, in the history of human relations in the world,

ranging from the smallest of human units to the largest of them, individual differences have equally been a great source of commotions, ill-feelings, jealousy, illegalities and inhumaneness. Differences have bred conflicts and conflicts have degenerated into wars that lasted for centuries; families have been dispersed and kinship ties severed and lost. Such crises have made behavioural scientists wonder about what goes on in the human mind; what motivates such negative behaviours. How can “normal people” do this to one another? To understand such behaviours, scholars have had to look to the role that identity

plays in shaping them. Identity questions border on understanding what makes up an individual and what directs their behaviours. In psychology literature the concept of identity is often discussed in relation to the notion of self-concept (Sedikides & Brewer, 2001; Stets & Burke, 2003). That is, the characteristics or traits, social roles, group membership and interpersonal relations which all contribute to the definition of who we are and how we perceive ourselves (Oyserman, Elmore & Smith, 2012; Stets & Burke, 2003). It is the personally conceived meanings, societally ascribed definitions and personal experiences that interact to give a conception of the self (Stets & Burke, 2003; Tajfel, 1978).

Individuals have multiple self-definitions or identities; a question of “who are you” can birth a response that encompasses gender, religion, race, social roles, profession, familial roles, ethnicity and nationality. All these identities play a role in directing and orienting behaviours, understanding the world, making choices and in regulating self (Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley, 2008; Oyserman et al., 2012). Of all these identities, of most importance to the present discourse is social identity(s) defined by membership in a group. Tajfel (1978) describes social identity as an aspect of the self-concept developed from knowledge of membership of a social group(s) and the emotional attachment and value connotation of such membership. The importance of understanding group dynamics has been at the heart of social psychological researches and this has been investigated from different angles. Such shared identities serve as

motivation to protect and uphold group interest, values, status, resources, customs, traditions and territories (Bizumic & Duckitt, 2012; Herskovits 1972). Understanding social identity and the role it play in multicultural societies is particularly important to Nigeria given her cultural diversity.

The Nigeria Society: A Tale of Multiple Social Identities

Nigeria is a conglomeration of people with multiple social identities. A Nigerian typically may identify with the following social identities as defined by local government, state of origin, ethnic group, religion, political party and region. The existence of such social identities makes paramount the question of whether the concept of national identity can be said to be true in Nigeria and how such multiple loyalties may conflict with one another. Each of these identities may exert influence on the individual’s behaviour depending on their saliency in self-definition, extent of identification and situational demands (Benet-Martínez, Lee & Leu, 2006; Lalonde, Giguère, Fontaine & Smith, 2007). Three social identities are at the forefront in inter-group relations within the country; social identity as defined by religion, ethnic group and political party (Olonisakin & Adebayo, 2017). The idea of multiple identity in Nigeria is not a new one, it has equally been emphasised by Eke (1975) in his theory of two publics in Africa. One is the primordial public which is based on identification with ethnic group or other primordial groups. The second is the civic

public which connotes the government or the state. The primordial public largely influences the behaviours of its members, extract more loyalty from them and resists the control of the civic public (Eke, 1975).

The three predominant social identities in the country have been a source of conflict over the years. The inability to relate with and accommodate differences and complexities at the inter-ethnic, inter-religious and inter-political front has been grounds for inter-personal and inter-group clashes in the country (Adebayo & Olonisakin, 2017). As a result of the dynamics of inter-group relations in Nigeria and the potentials they hold for national unity and development, peaceful coexistence is necessary if the country is to make it as a nation. The first step in solving a problem is to understand its causal factors. Below is an attempt to understand the behaviours of social groups in Nigeria.

Nigeria: Understanding the Divide

Exploring and understanding inter-group behaviours has a long history that birthed such theories as the Social Categorisation Theory (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987), Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1978), Self-verification Theory (Swann, 1983), Realistic Group Conflict Theory (Sherif, 1966), Terror Management Theory (Pyszczynski, Greenberg, & Solomon, 1997) and Frustration Aggression Theory (Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mowrer & Sears, 1939) among others. Analyses of these theories produce the summation that conflict between groups are motivated by the need for personal and/or group survival or existential needs.

The above theories have been variously applied in understanding group relations and do explain it. However, there has been an advocacy to explore indigenous problems within the context and tradition so as to understand them (Nsamenang, 2007). In response to such a call, the present paper seeks to understand inter-group relations within the context of cultural values. Specifically, it looks to the richness of proverbs as a value indicator of what is important in a society.

Proverbs are popular wisdom and tradition of a particular culture which gives a background to the values and shared beliefs of that community. They are meant to offer advice, criticism and warning in everyday life (Ramírez, 2015). According to Otaxonovna and Komilovna (2014) proverbs contain national wisdom drawn from past experiences and reflect the people's mode of thinking and how they perceive the world. They are a glimpse of the peculiar story of a particular society, their experiences and their interpretation of such experiences and what is important to them. The essence of proverbs is captured by Martin (2018) "Nothing defines a culture as distinctly as its language, and the element of language that best encapsulates a society's values and beliefs is its proverbs". It is said that "If you want to know a people, know their proverbs" (as cited in Schuster, 1998) because they will reflect the attitude of the people (Lovell, 2001). Likewise, Akporobaro and Emovon (1994) posit that the proverb of a nation or society can be taken as an ethnography of its people which if organised can give an insightful picture of

the people's ways of living, philosophies, worldview, morals and social values. Proverbs are quite permanent which suggests that they are passed from generation to generation (Granbom-Herranen, 2011). They are used mostly in speech and address the typical everyday issues such as weather, religion, family, law, health and superstitions (Otaxonovna & Komilovna, 2014). Therefore going points to the importance of proverbs in understanding different cultures and its people.

Proverbs hold a very important role in cultural socialisation in Nigeria and it is a mode of communicating the norms and values in the society (Emeakaroha, 2002). The importance of proverbs in Nigeria is exuded by such sayings among the Yoruba and Igbo tribes respectively "when words are lost, it is proverbs that we use to find them" and proverbs "are the palm oil with which words are eaten". Proverbs in the Nigeria context are used in reference to local images or objects that the listener is familiar with which mean that understanding proverbs makes one a true citizen of such a community (Emeakaroha, 2002); this point to the importance of proverbs in conversation and in everyday relations.

From the foregoing discourse on proverbs, the thesis is not to say that proverbs can replace theories in the understanding of social relations. Rather, it is to underscore the importance of looking at how the behaviours of a people may be understood within the codes or creed they live by. Specifically, it is to emphasise how culturally ingrained values derived from historical experience of people may drive

their thought processes and behaviours in inter-group context. In the African context particularly, proverbs have been emphasised as having a special function and theoretical richness that makes them important part of different topics and problems (Barry, 2000). This approach of looking to proverbs to understand cross-cultural behaviours is not new. For example, Hou (2013) examined how culture-specific proverbs can be used to understand the behaviours of Americans, Japanese, Arabs and the Irish with regards to uncertainty-avoidance, communication and power-distance. Zhao (2013) also examined Western and Chinese proverbs in relation to how their people behave with regards to social relationships, time orientation and humanity in harmony with nature. Likewise in Nigeria, several scholars (for example, Adegaju, 2009; Ademowo & Balogun, 2014) have approached proverbs in understanding conflict and proposing conflict resolution strategies in social relations.

Nigeria is a multi-cultural society and thus has different cultures with its own proverbs. In appeal to space constraint and a lack of or limited understanding of the proverbs of other cultures within the country, this paper captures only the usefulness of the Yoruba proverbs in understanding social relations within the country. However, this is not to say that other cultures do not house proverbs that are rich in its analytical power to understand group relations within the country. The importance of proverbial wisdom in guiding behaviours is equally emphasised in every cultural group in Nigeria (Emeakaroha, 2002; Okafor, 1975).

The nature of Yoruba proverbs is that it can vary in meaning and it is context-dependent (Fasiku, 2006). This means that a particular Yoruba proverb can have multiple usage or meanings depending on the context of use. It is also very much a part of everyday conversation and it is used for clarity and conciseness in discussion (Fasiku, 2006). Yoruba proverbs are said to be powerful tools of socialising people with acceptable norms, philosophy and values in the society and are product of historical experience (Olatunji, 2012). For example, Yoruba proverbs such as “*A rí se l’a rí kà, a rí kà baba irègún*” (our deeds are what we can mention; what we can mention are the major credits we can gloat about) and “*A kí’ni í jé a kí’ni, a fí ‘ni hàn í jé a fí ‘ni hàn; èwo ni ‘o kú ò, ará Ibàdàn, l’ójúdé Sódeké* (Salutation is known as salutation, betrayal is known to be betrayal; how does one classify ‘How are you, you native of Ibadan?’ in front of *Sódeké’s* house?)” (Delano, 1972 as cited in Fasiku, 2006) are products of intra-group hostilities among the Yorubas.

With regards to survival or existential needs several Yoruba proverbs are applicable. “*Ati kekere lati peka iroko to ba dagba ama gbebo lowo eni*” (Literarily: It is better to nip a potential trouble in the bud or be proactive rather than reactive), “*Bi oni se ri ola o ri be lomú ki babalawo da ifa ororun*” (Literarily: No one knows tomorrow that is why one must be prepared), “*Tori ka ma jiya laafi ya ma jiya lofa*” (Literarily: So as not to suffer, we must put in place things to prevent suffering), “*Ogun agbotele ki pa aro to ba gbon*” (Literarily: Having

foresight helps one to prepare) and “*Oko kii je ti baba t’omo koma ni aala*” (Literarily: No matter how close one is to another person there should still be a boundary because there is always room for quarrel).

These proverbs prescribe preparedness, wisdom and foresight in human relations so as to ensure survival. They hold significance for conflicts, rivalry, resource sharing and coexistence among competing groups. For instance in inter-group relations, they can be adapted to mean: one must be able to envisage potential conflict, plan how to handle such conflicts, make sure there are clear-cut boundaries, make sure one has the upper hand in a competitive situation, never let down one’s guard and being on constant alert for what can cause harm to one.

The emphasis on existential needs in Yoruba rhetoric is also not limited to the preservation of the individual but also of the group. It emphasises the importance of the group, togetherness and communal orientation. Yoruba culture is one that places much emphasis on communal living and filial piety (Okafor, 1974), believing that the individual does not exist in isolation from the community which gives him/her “physical and ideological identity” (Emeakaroha, 2002). Thus, many proverbs are devoted to the importance of the group and communal orientation. For example, “*Agbajo owo ni a fi i so aaya*” (Literarily: it is through a united front that we can maintain our pride), “*Ki a rin ki a po, yiye lo n yeni*” (Literarily: doing things in group is better), “*Enikan kii je, ki ilu fe*” (Literarily: the prosperity of one person is not the prosperity of all), “*Ajoje ko dun benikan ko*

ni” (Literarily: sharing resources is less satisfying when some do not have to share), “*Tori kan ba suan aran igba*” (Literarily: A prosperous individual can enrich many others).

These proverbs, as philosophies adapted to group relations suggest the significance the community holds for the individual and therefore the need to respect, protect and ensure that it prospers. It emphasises the importance of team work and concern about other’s welfare.

Given the above analogy about Yoruba proverbs and their emphasis on individual and group survival, it bears similarity to the propositions of the aforementioned traditional theories of group relations with regards to individual and group survival. Existential needs here in the Nigeria context translate into having autonomy, power, freedom and territory for the different ethnic groups (Albert, 1999; Oladoyin, 2001) given the history of power relations within the country. When people get to power, in addition to improving their lives and those of their immediate family members, they make efforts to give back to the community where they come from. Furthermore, people are attuned to governmental policies and actions and their present and future implications for their ethnic, religious, political groups and regions. For example, when President Buhari enlisted the country in the Islamic Coalition against Terrorism formed by Saudi Arabia, Christians in the country were worried that he was trying to Islamise the country (Taiwo-Obalonye, 2016). Also, the appointment of security chiefs mostly from the north was perceived

as a threat by other ethnic groups (Ajibola, 2018).

The threat felt by Christians and by other ethnic groups regarding the decisions of the president may be likened to symbolic threat espoused by Stephan and Stephan (2000). Symbolic threat is experienced when there is the perception that the norms of ones’ group will be eroded or its name will be undermined in history. These events may also be construed as life-threatening because if security chiefs are mostly from the north how can other regions be guaranteed their safety. This is in line with the proposition of terror management theory that human beings are acutely aware of their mortality and they dedicate a lot of energy and resources to deal with this fear (Pyszczynski et al., 1997). Finally, perceived threat to one, one’s group and one’s group’s norms and traditions produces negative intergroup relations such as xenophobia, in-group bias, ethnocentrism, violence, discrimination and prejudice (Harrison & Peacock, 2010; Stephan & Stephan, 2000) and these are quite evident in the inter-group relations within the country.

The claim is not that everyone goes around armed with proverbs that guide their conduct in situations of inter-group relations. Rather, the emphasis is that the proverbs are very much a part of conversations and everyday living and they reflect the values and historical experiences of people of that culture. Thus, they may come readily to mind in competitive or conflict situations for the analysis of outgroup behaviours and the fate or survival of in-group and they may drive behaviours. Having understood social relations within the purview of proverbs that

prescribe how people ought to relate with one another, the next section explores the factors that may perpetuate such values playing out in everyday relations.

Historical and Social-Psychological Factors Maintaining the Divide

Nigeria's socio-cultural scenery in terms of inter-group relations is a picture designed by her history. The diversity in people and cultures has constructed a painting of poorly aligned edges as each group vie for its own survival. The history that created the nation is still today the history that directs its social relations. To summarise, for political power the colonial masters initiated a system of divide and rule which accorded more power, economic and social development to some ethnic groups, while the rest were left to scamp for a way to survive and be heard (Abdulrahman, 2004). The perception of lack of support by the masses from the government and the belief that the rulers were more concerned about themselves than the masses led to more identification with ethnic and communal ties than the nation (Eke, 1975). This equally led to the formation of ethnic militias representing different ethnic groups and different regions (Jacob, 2012). It equally engineered a system in which each ethnic, religious and political group perceive that "it is each group for itself". The persistent mistrust, prejudice and violence that have ensued between the groups have led to a perpetual state of concern that one group is out to dominate the other and a heightened need to protect itself from present and anticipated marginalisation or even total annihilation in the power tussle.

While the colonial rulers set the platform for ethnic, religious, political and regional rivalry, Nigerians individually and collectively in social groups have maintained the division in the country through their actions and inactions. This can be observed in the attitude that people hold towards issues that border on group dominance and in their behaviours towards people considered as outgroups. The following are some social-psychological variables implicated in maintaining negative inter-group relations within the country.

1. Social Categorisation

Human beings to a large extent want an orderly and predictable world. Through social categorisation, human beings can tolerate the diverse people they encounter by imposing a label on them (Bodenhausen, Kang & Peery, 2011). Such label helps to identify the characteristics peculiar to different categories, to know how to respond to them and to make inferences about others that fit such categories (Bodenhausen et al., 2011). People thus identify and socialise with people of shared characteristics such as race, gender, nationality or region. Empirical research has shown that such categorisation leads people to use in-group as a reference for their behaviours and adopt and practice the attitude and norms of the in-group while exhibiting discrimination against the out-group (Bizumic & Duckitt, 2012).

In Nigeria, the phenomenon of social categorisation is readily evidenced as people prejudge and discriminate against people considered as different in social markers important to them. Nigeria has many ethnic groups, three predominant religions,

different political parties and six geopolitical zones. Each of these social categories has markers that make them easily recognisable or identifiable. For example, there are facial features, accent, dressing, tribal marks, philosophies, complexion, slogan, emblems, and attitudes that are synonymous with certain social group. Such visible markers help people to identify whether or not they are affiliated with an individual and whether they would be interested in interaction with such an individual. For example, the ethnic group, political party and religion of those in power tend to be perceived as the one ruling the nation ("Government", n.d; Hilary, 2014), thus, making people of other ethnic groups to feel less affinity and show less support for those at the helm of affairs.

Given the history of social relations within the country, each group has evolved with certain characteristics that are descriptive of them and which are quickly applied to anyone who belongs to or fit such social categories. Thus, an individual may be prejudged or discriminated against because he or she belongs to a different social category. Thus, while social categorisation helps the individual understand and relate with the world, it also boxes them in a corner and encourages the use of stereotypes in relating with people of different groups.

2. Outgroup Homogeneity Bias

This refers to a tendency to perceive more similarity among members of outgroup than among in-group and to be unfair to them (Linville & Jones, 1980). The following reasons which are categorised as need-based motives (Ostrom & Sedikides, 1992) have

been proposed to explain outgroup homogeneity bias.

One is the need for positive self-identity (Tajfel, 1978) which leads the group to attribute positive characteristics to in-group and its activities. The media usually contains tirades of one social group bastardising another group. For example, during the campaign for 2015 presidential election a supporter of All Progressive Congress (APC) was reported to have said "we have decided to rescue Nigeria from Poverty Development party" (Buari, 2015) intentionally interpreting the acronym of the opposition party into something undesirable. Two is the need for uniqueness (Krueger & DiDonato (2008; Synder & Fromkin, 1980) which can make people minimise or trivialise diversity among out-group members. By putting one face to the out-group and submerging individual identity in group identity, members of the out-group can be perceived as being the same. For example, most southerners perceive everyone from the north as Hausa/Fulani and as Muslims (Baaballiyo, 2016; Dikwa, n. d). They equally attribute negative qualities the Hausa/Fulanis are deemed to possess to all northerners.

Also the lumping together of Hausa and Fulani ethnic groups which are two distinct ethnic groups (Baaballiyo, 2016; Dikwa, n. d) is a way to attribute the same characteristics to both groups. Rather than try to identify and understand the vast arrays of ethnic groups, languages and cultures in the north and feel the need to differentiate the groups and perhaps identify groups that may have nothing to do with mayhem in the

history of Nigeria, it is easier to group everyone together. This will prevent the cognitive effort needed to appraise the different groups or understand them (Bargh, 1991). In order to be able to emphasise the uniqueness or the differences between one's region (in-group) and other regions (out-groups), everyone who is an indigene of a particular region (out-group) is perceived in the same way despite having sub-groups or cultures within them. This is to establish a clear contrast between regions and to have an all-encompassing label for each. Since individual self-esteem is tied to group-esteem and a group's worth and prestige is what it is in relation to what that of the outgroup is; it then follows that in-group member's act in ways that distinguish, promote and maximise the group's worth (Tajfel, 1978).

Three is the need for predictability; knowing that all members of an out-group are the same or share similar attributes makes it easy to anticipate correctly the pattern of relationship with them, rather than having to learn how to relate with each member of the outgroup each time one encounters a new member (Bodenhausen et al., 2011; Irwin, Tripodi & Bieri, 1967). Thus, for example, the rule of thumb of "if you are a northerner then you are Hausa/Fulani" makes it easier to relate with them within existing stereotypes and anticipate their behaviours.

Fourth, is the need to justify the hostility displayed towards out-group members and the favouritism shown towards members of in-group (Wilder, 1986). The human ego is totalitarian and needs to continually see itself in a positive light (Greenwald, 1980),

hence, people may deindividuate out-group members in order to consider them equally deserving of unjust treatment and to make it easier to be hostile towards them especially in time of grave conflict (Wilder, 1980). For example, in reaction to the quit notice issued by Arewa youths to the Igbos living in the north, IPOB members began to search for Hausas to kill in Aba (Inyang, 2017). By grouping all persons from one ethnic as the same, they targeted the Hausas residing within their state for retaliation.

Fifth is that when the group's identity is hurt, opportunity to denigrate the out-group helps to restore the group's esteem (Sherman & Cohen, 2006). For example, having lost the 2015 presidential election, the leader of Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) a year after made the statement that APC had reversed their legacies and accomplishments of the past 16 years (Eniola & Akanbi, 2016). Outgroup homogeneity bias is at the forefront of inter-group relations within the country. Statements like "all Igbos are the same" "all Hausas are violent" and Igbiras are not human beings" showcases the lumping of people of one ethnic group together based on a particular stereotype of the group. This behaviour is also obvious in state of origin, township, religious and political classifications in Nigeria.

3. Moral Disengagement

When inter-group relations within the country are discussed, at the heart of such discussion is the issue of morality. If society is predicated on the awareness by individuals that people's lives are inextricably interwoven (Myers & Spencer,

2001) what then is the implication of inter-group behaviours for moral behaviours? What happens when individuals or groups place their lives and their personal and group needs above those of others? According to Bandura (1990), devoid of morality and self-regulatory process, people will subscribe to actions they deem important in a given moment. If people begin to subscribe to personally held values or social group-defined norms or philosophies without a consideration for the implications of such to human lives and the peaceful coexistence needed for progress in a society, how bright is the future of such a society?

Another pertinent question is, are people unaware of moral implications of their behaviours? Given that people like to think of themselves as moral persons (Schnall & Roper, 2011) because it serves ego-boosting functions (Bandura (1990), how then can people persist in deliberate discrimination, prejudice and violence? Bandura (1990; 2002) proposed the concept of moral disengagement to explain how people can convince themselves that they have no moral imperative in the face obvious moral contradictions. He proposed that through certain mechanisms of disengagement people are able to rid themselves of current or future misdemeanours. Such mechanisms are:

- **Moral Justification:** this involves finding ways of convincing the self that one's actions are justified and warranted. This is evidenced in a statement made by Aliyu Gwarzo a supporter of APC during the last

election about killing and maiming if the presidency does not come to the north because Allah has given the Northerners the nation to rule (Our Reporter, 2014). Another fitting example is Professor Ango Abdullahi's justification of the killings by the Fulani herdsmen. He said the herdsmen were only defending themselves "...if you want to kill me and I have a chance first, I will kill you, or you do want people to be killed and not defend themselves?" (Oluwafemi, 2018). He also did not consider it out of the ordinary for Chief Olu Falae to be kidnapped and his farm raided by herdsman, saying his uncle and cousins have experienced the same. When asked if he was defending the actions of the herdsmen "I am justifying it very strongly because herdsmen are being unjustly treated in this country...". "...If an Igbo man can go to the North and set up a business, why won't herdsmen go to the South, including your village, to graze their cattle?..." (Oluwafemi, 2018).

- **Euphemistic Labelling:** this involves making an act less formidable by giving it an appealing name. Thus, for example, discriminating in favour of one's ethnic group in giving out employment at the detriment of other qualified applicant of other ethnic group or religion can be qualified as "charity begins at home". Likewise,

the response of the Inspector General of Police to the herdsmen attack in Benue state showcases euphemistic labelling. An event that led to the death of over 20 persons was characterised as “mere communal crisis” and “communal misunderstanding” (Godwin, 2018).

- **Advantageous or Palliative Comparison:** this mechanism involves comparing one’s action to perceived more foreboding actions of others. For example, a corrupt politician who has siphoned the resources of the state for personal benefit and for bogus project may believe he is better off than some other politician of a different ethnic group or political party who has embezzled more.
- **Dehumanisation:** this mechanism works by qualifying the recipients of injurious consequences of one’s actions as less than human or unworthy of a better treatment and therefore as deserving of such consequences. By divesting the recipients of one’s actions of human qualities one may feel less or no remorse for concluded or proposed injurious actions. For example, inter-religious violence may be seen as necessary if people of other religions are regarded as infidels. The Boko Haram leader usually refer to the victims and the Nigeria government and its practices as infidels and aberration to the doctrine of Allah (Baffour, 2015)

- **Displacement of Responsibility:** through this mechanism an individual can convince themselves that they are not solely responsible for their actions or that they are only following the directives of another person. For example, inter-religious crises may be fuelled by the belief that one’s religion has given a holy imperative to do away with infidels therefore violence as a means of fulfilling such declaration is justified. The Boko Haram leader and his group have at various time justified their killings and disruption of peace in the country as one which has the backing of Allah (Baffour, 2015)

While the three factors discussed are not exhaustive of the social-psychological factors in play in maintaining ethnic division in the country, they at least capture the typical ones or sum the length and breadth of the mode of inter-group relations. That is, a relational pattern of “we-they categorisation-they are all the same-justification of negative behaviours towards each other”. Having examined the factors that maintain division in the country, it is important to understand the social reality they produce.

Implications of the Social Identity Divide: Obstacles to Social Cohesion and National Development

Nigeria is a developing nation whose physical and human resources are dispersed across the nation thereby necessitating cooperation rather than unhealthy competition in order to be able to harness

her resources for nation building and development. However, fear of domination and relegation, selfish scheming and mutual suspicion among her constituents systems (political, ethnic and religious) make it difficult to uphold nationalism and patriotism. Instead people are concerned about how they can benefit themselves and their groups from the nation rather than what they can contribute to the nation (Osaghae, 2006). While the fear that pervades the nation about religious, ethnic and political domination can sometimes be irrational, it is sad to say that some of the time it is justified and completely rational. For instance, the security chiefs in the nation are mostly from the north like in the present government; the government has not deemed it fit to do something drastic to end the atrocities of the Fulani herdsmen across the nation but deemed it necessary and constitutional to deploy the Nigeria army to Abia state to curtail the activities of IPOB and the president joined the Coalition of Islamic States when a large portion of her citizens are Christians. With such actions and given the ethnic and religious affiliation of the president, one can understand how Nigerians arrive at the reasoning that the actions of the government in the person of the president has been mostly favourable to his own ethnic and religious group. Human beings are attuned to things or events that threaten their existence and survival (Matsumoto, 2009). Below are other implications of the disunity in the country.

1. Strangers in our Fatherland

A major negative consequence of the multiplicity of social identities in the nation

is that each group sees members of the other groups as strangers. While violent inter-ethnic, religious and political party strife have been largely documented, there is without doubt the everyday resentment, abuse and discrimination that people will experience and mete to each other. This is one reason why even after living in a particular place or region for many years one may still be considered a stranger or visitor if you are not an indigene of that place. Thus, the media is filled with news of reprisal attacks in one region because indigenes of such region were harmed in another part of the country.

2. Favouritism, Double Standards and Mediocrity

Anecdotal evidence shows that in business interaction, political appointment, friendship formation, marriage and employment people sometimes recourse to ethnic, religious and political party sentiments. Empirical research has also shown that favouritism on grounds of religion or ethnicity comes into play in recruitment in the civil service (Uwannah, 2015; Yaro, 2014). The consequences of such double standards are mediocrity, employment of incompetent personnel, increased governmental expenses and dampened standards in all sectors of the nation (Uwannah, 2015; Yaro, 2014).

3. Cultural Paranoia, Cultural Depression and Cultural Antisocialism

Grier and Cobb (1968) as cited in Adebayo (2001) proposed three defensive behaviours which can be used to explain inter-group relations within the country. Cultural paranoia arises from the belief that if an out

group dominate or holds power, one's in-group and its members will suffer. An example is that when one political party succeeds another in governance, it is usually believed that the new political party will engage in a "witch-hunt" of the actors of the previous government to indict them. For example, during the last presidential election, the PDP's candidate for Adamawa South Senatorial District expressed his fear that if Buhari wins the presidential election, members of his party will be jailed. He said "...You know Buhari, he will send us to jail for between 200 to 300 years and it is the lucky ones among us that will get 50 years...". Also the open grazing law by the federal government is perceived as an attempt to favour the Hausa/Fulani ethnic group, to deny people in different regions of their lands and as part of the president plan to ensure that Islam dominates in Nigeria ("Grazing Bill", 2018).

Cultural depression occurs in reaction to accumulated experience of subjugation by a group such that it becomes characterised as incapable and denied the chance to change such perception. For instance, the leadership of the nation in terms of the presidential seat and other major political offices have been rotated among only a few of the ethnic groups while the others have been relegated to the side-line. Specifically, the Igbo ethnic group has been deemed incapable of playing the opposition in the nation's politics compared to the Yorubas and they among themselves question their ability to play meaningful role in Nigeria's politics (Igbokwe, 2015).

Finally, cultural antisocialism is the consequence of paranoia and depression that arises from years of discrimination. This is show-cased in war, conflict and the emergence of ethnic militias to protest the status quo. An example of cultural antisocialism is the civil war of 1967 which resulted from the Igbo's demanded for a nation of theirs. Other examples are the activities (vandalisation, kidnapping and killing) of ethnic militias in Niger/Delta region who advocate for the recognition and progress of their ethnic group and region.

4. **Ethnocentrism**

People tend to see themselves as moral persons (Schnall & Roper, 2011) because such perception of the self is good for the self-concept (Bandura, 1990). A corollary of such perception is that people construe their ways and values as also right and one that should be imbibed by others (Bizumic & Duckitt, 2012; Herskovits 1972) whether or not they air this view (Herskovits, 1972). In a society of cultural diversity, emphasising the superiority of personal norms and traditions amid the multitude of others, invariably leads to discrimination, prejudice, favouritism, conflict and even war. An example of an ethnocentric statement is the one made by Buhari the current president in 2001 "God willing, we will not stop the agitation for the total implementation of the Sharia in the country,". Another ethnocentric statement is equally credited to Buhari in 2003 "Muslims should only vote those who will promote Islam. We are more than the Christians if you add our Muslim brothers in the West."(Austin, 2014). These statements imply the superiority of the

Islamic religion and the position that it should be practiced nationwide.

5. Xenophobia

According to Russell (1901), “collective fear stimulates herd instinct” and produces a ferocity towards those not considered to belong to the herd. Nigeria is a nation of many nations; though her constituent ethnic groups mingle, they are still largely conscious of their origin and the importance of protecting and sustaining their identity in the potpourri of ethnic identities. Autonomy, domination, power and territory are major concerns of ethnic groups in the country and have been the triggers of inter-ethnic conflicts over the years (Albert, 1999; Oladoyin, 2001). Each ethnic group sees the others as different and as strangers competing for their stake in the nation. Thus, relations are characterised by fear, suspicion, hostility and conflict. Such prolonged state of negative inter-group relations makes the parties involved become highly sensitive to threatening cues or potentially threatening ones, overrate threats, selectively attend to memories that produce fear and become unable to explore alternative explanations for the perceived threat (Berkowitz, 1993; Clore, Schwarz & Conway, 1994). For example, the President’s decision to join the Islamic Coalition against Terrorism was perceived by Christians in the country as an attempt to Islamise the country (Taiwo-Obalonye, 2016). The inability of the government to stop the killings by the herdsman in different part of the country and its open grazing law are perceived as an attempt to favour the Hausa/Fulani ethnic group and as part of the

president’s attempt to Islamise the country (“Grazing Bill”, 2018). Given that the ethnic group of the president is Fulani, people are sensitive to issues or policies that seem to favour his ethnic group or the north in general.

Recommendations

Given that societal survival requires interdependence (Myers & Spencer, 2001) and the mass consciousness that one’s behaviours necessarily affects others; it becomes essential that Nigerians learn to coexist. Below are some recommendations on the way forward for Nigeria.

1. Lessons from Yoruba Proverbs

It is said that theories that explains conflict also carries with it the antidote to resolve such conflicts. Some of the Yoruba proverbs discussed earlier in this paper just as they explain the role of individual and group survival needs in inter-group conflict also offer insightful prescription on how to engender peaceful coexistence or at least tolerance in the nation.

For example, *Okò kii je tí bábá t’òmo kómá ní aalá*. This proverb speaks to the impossibility of downplaying ethnicity and regional boundaries. A major marker of ethnic identity in Nigeria is geographical location; different ethnic groups have a particular region they are identified with. Such regions are marks of their sovereignty and identity and in some cases have a lot of histories behind them. Thus, governmental policies or arrangements that borders on eliminating or belittling the differences between host community members and immigrants in terms of power and access or

entitlement to resources is a call for unnecessary trouble. An example is the proposition by the federal government to establish cattle colonies in different states of the country, a trade that is particularly identified with the north and the Hausa/Fulanis in particular. This means that as a matter of law, the herdsmen will be able to settle within a state of their choosing which invariably means that in the future, they may increase in size, need more land to expand and they can lay claim to political power or ask for political representation as people of that state. This is the case of the Hausa/Fulani settlers and the indigenes of Plateau state and the Jukun and Tiv in Taraba state.

Some scholars (Adesoji & Alao, 2008; Oyeweso, 2006) advocate for elevation of citizenship over indigeneship and individual rights over group rights and granting of full residency rights to individuals who have resided in a region for a given number of years citing the case of some advanced countries such as United States of America, China and as cases in point. However, these are places with settler/ immigrant histories and economic and political realities different from Nigeria which space constraint will prevent its exploration.

The proverb that preceded the above analogy literally translates that a father and a son cannot share a farmland without clear-cut boundary of which portion belongs to whom. This means that even in a close relationship of father-son type, resource sharing can still engender conflict; hence there is the need to be aware of each other's limits and territory. People are very much

aware of the political implication of increasing population of other ethnic groups in their regions in terms of recognition and political representation and power. The history that trailed each ethnic group to this day can never be easily forgotten and the political machinations of those that get to power are very much a part of people's consciousness. Thus, any governmental policy that fails to take cognisance of this or belittles it may not succeed in maintaining inter-ethnic peace.

Furthermore, another proverb prescriptive of a way to engineer peace in Nigeria is that "*Ajoje ko dun benikan ko ni*". This proverb in group relations may suggest that sharing resources is less satisfying when some do not have; thereby implying that it is important to help others along. However, it may equally suggest that sharing resources is more satisfying when everyone contributes. This has significance for revenue generation and resource sharing within the nation. The mainstay of the economy of the nation is crude oil and its sources are cited within specific regions in the country. Thus, some particular regions of the country may be able to claim that their regions sustains the nation and hold it to ransom when they perceive they are relatively deprived. It is therefore imperative that each region be able to lay claim to something they are contributing to the nation. This may prevent or reduce the resentment that resource-generating states or regions have towards those contributing little or nothing. This may also remove the perception that some regions are the ones

sustaining the nation and the sense of entitlement that comes with it.

Equally the proverb “*Agbajo owo ni a fi i so aaya*”, “*Ki a rin ki a po, yiye lo n yeni*” and “*Enikan ki i je, ki ilú fè*” suggests that it is through unity and concerted effort that national pride can be attained. What makes Nigeria is the sum total of her people, their cultures and the resources they can boast of or contribute in the international community. If the national identity is to be upheld and her social identities are to be maintained there is need to find ways to coexist peacefully. For example, Nigeria is a member of OPEC because she is an oil-producing nation and enjoys the benefit of membership. Equally she has received aid in the past from world organisations such as United Nations (UN) and International Monetary Fund (IMF) because they evaluated her capacity as a “nation” to return such funds. Therefore, the national identity has been instrumental in achieving a lot for the nation and disbanding the nation may lead to forfeiture of such opportunities or a tortuous process of regaining them.

Likewise, the proverbs “*Ati kekere lati peka iroko to ba dagba ama gbebo lowo eni*”, “*Bi oni se ri ola o ri be lomú ki babalawo da ifa ojojumo*”, “*Tori ka ma jiya laafi ya ma jiya lofa*” and “*Ogun agbotele ki pa aro to ba gbon*” are prescriptive of foresight and preparedness. At the individual level, they suggest proactiveness and need to plan for ones survival. At the national level in terms of inter-group relations, they suggest that an all-out war will not be beneficial for any group. It is better to curtail any form of aggression, marginalisation and

discrimination that may result into a full blown crisis that may exceed the ones we have had in the nation in the past. A good example will be the civil war of 1967. The proverbs are also suggestive that peaceful coexistence in ethnic, religious and political domains are issues the nation have to continuously attend to and crises in any region should be quickly attended to before it gets out of hand. For example, the issues of Boko Haram has been said to be the product of religious intolerance between Christians and Muslims that went unchecked by the government (“Religious crisis”, 2013). Finally, every policy or law should always be anticipatory of their implications for inter-group sense of security and survival.

2. Adopting the Principle of Affirmative Action in Public and Private Services

Affirmative action refers to a policy that emphasises the protection and special consideration for groups that are or have been historically marginalised within a society or culture. It involves public and private institutions such as political office, hospitals, universities, security services, banks and other forms of organisations giving special considerations to every group in the society particularly the ones that have been excluded from such opportunities in the past. This will involve giving special consideration to religion, gender, ethnic affiliation, state of origin, physical disability and so on.

An affirmative action currently in practice in Nigeria is the Principle of Federal Character. This principle provides that at the federal

and state levels appointment into public offices or public agencies should not be dominated by one group (state, ethnic or religious). This was to ensure unity among the different ethnic groups and other social groups within the nation. The problem with this principle is its shoddy or haphazard application in the country's affairs. For example, in the appointment of security chiefs, President Buhari is said to have violated the federal character principle as most of the security chiefs are from the north and are Muslims (Oloja, 2017). The president claimed that the appointment was based on merit and on the good records of those appointed (Ndujihe, Agande, Akinrefon & Nwabughio, 2015). This implies that he could not find people of other ethnic groups or religions who merited such appointments. This took place while the Federal Character Commission which is meant to guide against such lopsided appointments did nothing (Oloja, 2017). Another issue is the case of discriminatory cut-off marks to gain admission into federal secondary schools. Having different cut-offs marks based on region, ethnicity, gender and state of origin is clearly discriminatory. If sectional concern and inclusiveness is pursued rather than merit in order to ensure that people from educationally-disadvantaged regions or states are given opportunity to be enrolled in schools, why is the same not pursued in federal appointment?

Ensuring that the principle of Federal Character is applied in all matters of social services and does not discriminate in favour or against any group or section will reduce

feelings of marginalisation, the perception that some groups are unduly favoured and remove mediocrity in public service. In addition, it will increase inter-group contact, understanding and tolerance and encourage psychological sense of community among Nigerians.

3. Emergence of a Leader Supportive of the Norm of Non-Discrimination

Leaders are very important to the survival of their followers and indeed the organisation over which they preside. Nigeria today still suffers from the political design of the colonial masters that led to ethnic and regional consciousness and rivalry. Thus, a leader who makes it a priority to reduce such consciousness and is exemplary in his pro-unity actions and policies will be taking a big step towards bridging the ethnic, political and religious divide within the country. Such a leader is likely to have some credibility because he would be perceived to be trustworthy and an expert in what he is doing. The social influence literature point to the importance of the audience's perceived trustworthiness and expertise of the communicator in leadership success (Passer, Smith, Atkinson, Mitchell & Muir, 2003). A credible leader in Nigeria has to be one which everyone can trust not to show ethnic, religious and political favouritism in actions and policies. Equally, only a leader devoted to managing ethnic, religious and political consciousness in the country can be considered qualified to lead the country.

4. Abolishing Religious Individualism in Societal Services

The social psychology literature emphasises inter-cultural contact in peaceful relations

and in reducing discrimination and ethnocentrism (Campbell, 2016; Harrison, 2011). A school is a primary agent of socialisation in which people are taught the norms of the society. Having institutions of learning which emphasise a particular religion is detrimental to peaceful coexistence within the country. These places may turn out people who are narrow-minded, dogmatic, totalitarian and conservative in their religious outlook. Having a place of learning with mixed religious orientations and teachings can help to understand other religions and encourage tolerance of people with different religious views. The government should as a matter of policy ensure that schools(at all levels) have in their curriculum courses on religion directed at teaching the understanding of different religions and the importance of peace and tolerance and that no school is established or populated on the basis of religion.

5. Cultural Intelligence CI

CI captures an ability to function effectively in different cultural situations. It is the sensitivity to and competency in ethnic differences (Livermore, 2011). It comprises of the ability to acquire knowledge of other people's culture, understand such culture, be motivated to ensure a successful inter-cultural interaction and adjusting one's behaviour in ways that reflect an understanding of such culture. Ways to increase CI include inter-ethnic relations or contact, multicultural studies in schools and expository information on different ethnic groups and their cultures through the mass

media such as in television and radio programmes.

6. Emotional Intelligence (EI)

At the individual level, it is important to learn how to regulate emotions in inter-ethnic relations and situations. EI involves an understanding of ones' emotional triggers, recognising and understanding others' emotions, the ability to anticipate own and others' emotions, empathy and the social skill to handle emotional situations (Goleman, 1998). EI in multicultural situations requires CI and the foresight of potentially conflicting issues and preparing for them.

Conclusion

The spate of group conflicts, rivalry and suspicion in the nation has come to head and there is need of drastic measures to ensure that the nation is not lost nor her people violently displaced. Such measures transcend putting the right policies in place and having the right people in governance. It encompasses attitude and value changes of individual Nigerians. The group identities in the country have been emphasised and manipulated to trigger many violent conflicts in reaction to perceived threat to individual and group survival. Though our social identities are important, it is equally important not to allow ourselves to be constrained by such identities into having a narrow mind and blinded loyalty. Before we are members of our social groups, we are first human beings which mean our foremost concern should be that the right and safety of everyone is not negotiable. Only when we have been able to address our local squabbles can we unite to build a nation.

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