

Building a cohesive state: Fifty-eight years of missing target**Shyngle K. Balogun, *Peter O. Famakinde**

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Abstract

The much focus given to transforming Nigeria from being a developing nation in the third world to a reckon-with nation seem rather unproductive as most of her social institutions concentrate on differing targets. Though each institution set brilliant goals, the inability to harness common effort towards a common target per time has made the Nigerian state appear as a failed state. The nation's economic challenges, insecurity issues, terrorism, infrastructural inadequacies, corruption and attempts at regional cessation, among many others, are all pointers of fifty-eight years of co-habitation without cohesion. This paper is set to bring to fore the missing links of interdependency, shared loyalties and solidarity among Nigeria social institutions. This study approaches from a qualitative and exploratory perspective with view to delineate the extent of social cohesion, building on a system of social indicators and identifying the dimensions of cohesiveness that should receive prompt attention in the Nigerian state; analysis of a projected cohesive state was done from self-categorization theoretical perspective. The paper suggested that the focus at national development should prioritize a mutually-exclusive effort by social groups, especially through collaboration, encouraging tolerance and setting of super-ordinate goals; a path through which the beauty of Nigerian diversity could rather be harnessed.

Keywords: Social cohesion, Social institutions, National development, Nigeria.

Introduction

The concept of unity was outright spelt as a goal of the Nigerian state from the onset of her creation as an honest declaration of the truth of diversity that characterizes every society, a reality that currently threatens the continuity of Nigeria. It is somewhat rhetorical what the Nigerian state would have been like if unity were not a watchword, because the extent of working together among constituent units of the Nigerian state today is highly lamentable, even with unity as a watchword. From the conception of the Nigerian state during the granting of her

independence in 1960, transiting through the military eras and the democratic reigns, it appears as though the concept of individualism had overridden collectivism among socio-political institutions, a west-diffused orientation that is obviously alien to our original traditional life-style. Hence, our grip on national cohesion, which is inherent in us and further strengthened by the collective fight for independence seem to have gradually slipped off our hands in the fight to belong and become like the individualist western states.

Nigeria a federation of many different nations is the most populous country in Africa with about 160 million people. The country is divided into 36 states and 748 local government areas. The religious, ethnic, and cultural diversities of the federating units no doubt make it a unique one. Otite (1990) in Mustapha (2007), identifies 374 ethnicities which are broadly divided into ethnic 'majorities' and ethnic 'minorities'. The majority ethnic groups are the Hausa-Fulani of the north, the Yoruba of the southwest, and the Igbos of the southeast.

However, the relationship between these groups is characterized by fear and suspicion of domination of one state or ethnic group by another. Meanwhile, this suspicion and fear between groups is historical. However, it became pronounced when Sir Frederick Lugard began the process of subjecting ethnic groups with a history of mutual distrust and hatred together as one Nigeria. Remarkably, these ethnic groups are not of equal population and hence some tend to dominate others, thus exploiting them. Also, political and economic imbalances exist among these various states or ethnic groups that make up Nigeria. These imbalances arose from the nature and character of the post-colonial Nigerian state.

It appears as though combined efforts to fight for independence by the then nationalists was just a super-ordinate goal that encouraged constituent units to ignore their inherent differences to focus on a common good; after the super-ordinate goal of independence was achieved, individual interest became more paramount than the national interest. This was more evident from the words of one of the leading nationalists that fought for Nigeria independence, a former Premier of the then Western Nigeria, late Chief Obafemi Awolowo (1947):

Nigeria is not a nation. It is a mere geographical expression. There are no

"Nigerians" in the same sense as there are "English," "Welsh" or "French." The word 'Nigerian' is merely a distinctive appellation to distinguish those who live within the boundaries of Nigeria from those who do not.

This orientation has brought about a choking socio-economic competition among the various ethnic groups which have resulted into ethno-regional conflict and tension that characterize Nigeria since 1960. The emergence of various militia groups in the Niger Delta, OPC in the South-West, MASSOB in the South East, Boko Haram and Herdsmen in the North, are all indications of the existence of rivalries between and among the various groups over the sharing of national cake. These ethnic, regional, and religious divides in the country have become so problematic with resultant patterns of inequalities. These inequalities are caused by a complex range of factors, including history, geography, cultural orientation, religious affiliation, natural resource endowments, current government policies, and past colonial policies.

Akinola and Adesopo (2011) in Aderonke (2013) support this argument when they posit that, the problem of ethnic minority has been receiving attention of scholars and practitioners of governance and development. This is because ethnic minority is usually sidelined and ignored by the majority in decision making and resources distribution. The consequence of such politics of exclusion has been agitation and demand for social inclusion, which at times results to violent actions.

It was in an attempt to weld together her disparate ethno-religious and linguistic entities that Nigeria opted for federalism in 1954 (Ojo, 2009). The assumption then was that, federalism is "a half-way house

between separate independent states and unification” (Beloff, 1953). It is a process of seeking unity, without uniformity, more so, where size, cultural and linguistic diversity, historical particularism and considerable decentralization prevails as in Nigeria. However, since 1954 when the foundation of classical federalism for Nigeria was laid, the system is still convoluting. The one and united Nigeria project adopted through amalgamation principle under British colonial rule in 1914 has been suffering from serious threats of collapse since 1966 till date.

This situation no doubt impedes efforts at national integration as it applies to the building of a united Nigeria out of the incongruent ethnic, geographic, social, economic and religious elements in the country. In realization of some inherent cleavages of inequalities, the federal character principle was introduced. This culminates into the establishment of federal character principle, which was entrenched in the 1979 Constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria as the best solution to solving this problem. The effectiveness of this policy measure in fostering national integration as well as promoting national development in Nigeria has been one of the most controversial and problematic issues in any political, social and economic discourse. The problem is that despite the adoption of the federal character principles since 1979, achieving national integration has been very difficult; it seems the aim of building a virile and united nation is a task too enormous to be achieved.

It was in view of correcting this abnormality that the Federal Character Commission was set up and inaugurated on July 2002 as an executive agency charged with the responsibility of implementing Federal Character provisions and to uphold its principles. The essence is to ensure that government decisions on citing industries,

building roads, awarding scholarships, appointment of public office holders, admission, employment and revenue allocations etc. reflect federal character. But the problem is that, there is still a high rate of lopsidedness in the above mentioned areas of government decisions. The high rate of social segregation inherent in the political and social realms of the country, ethnic and religion divides, agitations, and crises brought to the front burner the basis for the adoption of the federal character principle in Nigeria.

It is however not surprising that these ethnic groups are always in conflict and competition for scarce resources. Indeed, this is not unexpected especially between and among “ethnically defined constituencies”. The reason is that almost by definition, ethnic groups are in keen competition for the strategic resources of their respective societies. This is the case in Nigeria and other plural and segmented polities. This is so because ethnic groups are socio-cultural entities, consider themselves culturally, linguistically or socially distinct from each other, and most often view their relations in actual or potentially antagonistic terms (Cox, 1970). It is regular that groups with more effective tactics and strategies normally gain competitive advantages over other groups within their societies (Fred, 1967). Yet, this success is not without its liability. This is why national cohesion is more of a mirage in plural and divided societies than in homogenous ones. It is in this regard that Weiner (1987) in Ojo (2009) argues that developing nations’ central problem that is often more pressing than economic development is the achievement of integration.

Ifeancha and Nwagwu (2009) observed that the integration crisis facing Nigeria is manifest in the minority question, religious fundamentalism and conflicts, ethnic politics, indigene-settler dialectic, resource control,

youth restiveness and militancy and the clamour for a (sovereign) national conference or conversation about the terms of the nation's continued unification. The status quo has convulsed the productive sector, limited the impact of government's economic programmes on the people, threatened food insecurity, complexified social insecurity, deepened the deterioration of physical and social infrastructures, distressed the living standards of a vast majority of Nigerians, militated against the educational system and resulted in the ostracisation of the generality of Nigerians and their exclusion from the political and economic space, among other glitches. The entire social matrix in Nigeria is characterised by inter- and intra-community, inter and intra-ethnic, and inter and intra-religious strife. Some of these conflicts are as old as the history of the Nigerian nation. Like India, a federal state with its pluralised ethnic, religious and cultural status, Nigeria is a deeply divided and plural society (Ojo, 2009).

The problem is that of achieving solidarity in action and purpose in the midst of hundreds of ethnic nationalities each exerting both centrifugal and centripetal forces on the central issue of the nation, bound in freedom, peace and unity where justice reigns.

Self Categorization in National Cohesion

Turner and colleagues developed self-categorization theory (SCT) which drew on cognitive research on categorization (Turner, 1985; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher & Wetherell, 1987). SCT postulates that people perceive themselves as unique individuals and as members of groups, and that these two selves are equally valid expressions of the self. Otherwise stated, social identities (derived from groups people perceive themselves to be members of) are as true to the self as personal identities (derived

from views of the self as an individual). While the theory acknowledges the possibility of more than just personal and social identities, the cornerstone of SCT focuses on the study of social cognition and its effect on the development of social identity (Turner, 1982).

SCT argues that the perception an individual has of himself/herself is variable and that one can have multiple identities (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher & Wetherell, 1987). However, self-categorization theory places its emphasis on an individual's social identity. Social identity is defined as the part of the individual's self-concept that is derived from their knowledge of their membership in a social group, along with the value and significance they attach to that membership (Tajfel, 1981). Thus, SCT deals with the perception of the self in respect to certain social groups and other individuals. A critical aspect of SCT is that even if an individual possesses various self-concepts (e.g. "Nigerian," "Hausa," "Muslim"), a given specific identity is more salient at a given time, and that identity drives behavior. For example, if a student is hanging out with their group of friends after school, it is likely that his or her social group identity will take precedence over other aspects of his or her identity and, hence, have the most influence over behavior.

The cognitive representations of the self-concept take the form of categories that group similar people together. The category that the individual identifies with is referred to as the self-category or in-group while other categories are known as out-groups. SCT states that individuals categorize themselves into groups with persons perceived as similar to themselves (Turner et al, 1987). SCT proposes two necessary conditions for the emergence of self-categorization and group behaviors: identification and group category salience. When an individual can be identified as being a member of a certain

group, and the individual identifies with the category (e.g. perceives the category as relevant to their self and identity, identification is said to have occurred (Wagner, 1993). The change in perspective (from individual self to social self) is driven by the fit between the groups being categorized and the accessibility of the category.

The extent to which a social categorization is applied and relevant to the self is known as social categorization salience (Oakes, Turner, & Haslam, 1991). Salience is postulated to increase if the category is specifically mentioned (Hogg & Turner, 1985), the category is set in a context of other relevant categories (Turner et al, 1987), and if the category is set into conflict with other categories (Wagner & Ward, 1993). If self-categorization takes place, the previously mentioned conditions will render social identity and group membership more salient and relevant than personal identities. When this shift occurs, individuals define themselves as members of a group and perceive themselves to be interchangeable with members of that group. As the group membership becomes salient, group influence is more likely (Turner et al, 1987). Overall, SCT is a theory that explains how collective behavior results from shared norms and perspectives.

SCT also presents the metacontrast principle that states that a given group of people will be more likely to be perceived as a category if the mean differences between this set of individuals and all others of the context are perceived as larger than the mean differences between individuals within the group. The metacontrast principle speaks to the commonly used in-group versus out-group comparison. SCT posits that in-group members will perceive their group as more favorable than the out-group, particularly if the in-group is deemed of higher social status than the out-group.

SCT also argues that the attitudes, opinions, and behaviors individuals adopt are chosen as a way to be typical of the in-group (Hogg & Abrams, 2006). To identify with a group is to try to resemble that which the individual views as prototypical of the group. According to the metacontrast principle, the prototypicality of an individual will increase to the extent to which the mean difference between the individual and members of the other groups is large compared to the mean difference between this individual and other members of his/her group. SCT predicts that the group opinion converges to the opinion that is most prototypical of the initial intergroup consensus.

In the case of national identity, when the context contains a comparable national outgroup, the salience of the national ingroup increases, and perceived group homogeneity increases; when the context contains the national ingroup alone, the salience of the ingroup decreases, with individual categorizations, personal identities and individual differences becoming more salient instead (that is, perceived group homogeneity decreases).

Ideals of a Cohesive State

Social Cohesion is viewed as a characteristic of a society dealing with the connections and relations between societal units such as individuals, groups, associations as well as territorial units (McCracken, 1998). The sociologist Emile Durkheim was the first who used the concept of social cohesion. He considered social cohesion as an ordering feature of a society and defined it as the interdependence between the members of the society, shared loyalties and solidarity (Jenson, 1998b). Aspects often mentioned in describing social cohesion are the strength of social relations, shared values and communities of interpretation, feelings of a common identity and a sense of belonging to

the same community, trust among societal members as well as the extent of inequality and disparities (Woolley 1998, Jenson 1998b). The Social Cohesion Network of the Policy Research Initiative of the Canadian Government defined social cohesion as "the ongoing process of developing a community of shared values, shared challenges and equal opportunity within Canada, based on a sense of trust, hope and reciprocity among all Canadians" (PRI, 1999)

There have been various efforts to determine the dimensions of social cohesion. Collaboratively, the Canadian Policy Research Networks and the Policy Research Initiative of the Canadian Government, explored the dimensions of social cohesion as indicated in four policy documents of the Canadian Government, the French Government, the OECD, and the Club of Rome. Five dimensions were identified (Jenson, 1998b)

- Belonging – Isolation which means shared values, identity, feelings of commitment
- Inclusion – Exclusion which concerns equal opportunities of access
- Participation – Non-Involvement
- Recognition – Rejection which addresses the issue of respecting and tolerating differences in a pluralist society
- Legitimacy – Illegitimacy with respect to the institutions acting as a mediator in conflicts of a pluralist society

Furthermore, several implicit propositions on the dimensions of social cohesion can be extracted from descriptions of the concept and of empirical results. Similar to the three categories listed above, Woolley has distinguished three ways to define social cohesion (Woolley 1998, p. 2-5):

- as absence of social exclusion,

- as interactions and connections based on social capital
- as shared values and communities of interpretation based on group identity

A definition of social cohesion by relating it to the concepts of social exclusion/inclusion and of social capital has also been presented by other authors. For example Dahrendorf et al. (1995) described a social cohesive society as a society preventing social exclusion: "Social cohesion comes in to describe a society which offers opportunities to all its members within a framework of accepted values and institutions. Such a society is therefore one of inclusion. People belong; they are not allowed to be excluded" (Dahrendorf et al., 1995). Other scientists have emphasised that the social capital of a society is an essential foundation of its social cohesion (McCracken 1998; Maxwell 1996).

Conclusion

It appears clearly that national cohesion was only a reality during the early years of Nigerian independence, the events that followed suit had blatantly disintegrated the structure of the cohesive state we once had. Hence, the clamor for restructuring that came in recent years.

Restructuring here infers going back to the Independence Constitution which our leaders negotiated with the British between 1957 and 1959. It was on that basis that the three regions agreed to go to Independence as one united country. So, it was a negotiated constitution. This is because, if the three regions were not able to agree, there would not have been one united independent Nigeria. But because the three regions at that time negotiated and agreed to package a constitution, that is why they agreed to go to Independence together.

When the military came in 1966 and threw away the constitution, they threw away the negotiated agreement among the three regions, which was the foundation of a united

Nigeria. Hence, the military did not only throw away the constitution but a political consensus negotiated and agreed by our leaders of the three regions in those days which gave considerable autonomy to the regions. For example, each region at that time collected its revenue and contributed the agreed proportion to the centre. But when the military came, it was turned round and everything sent to the centre. That could not have been accepted by Ahmadu Bello, Nnamdi Azikiwe or Obafemi Awolowo.

The regions used to be federating units, but in today's Nigeria, they would now be called federal regions because states have been created in the regions. So that, in the West for example, you now have federation of Yoruba states which would belong to the Nigerian union at the centre, and the regions would have a considerable autonomy as they used to have.

In the initial structure negotiated at independence, every region then had its own constitution. There were four constitutions at independence –the Federal constitution, Western constitution, Eastern constitution and Northern constitution and every region had an ambassador in London. So, Nigeria had four ambassadors in London. That was the kind of arrangement that was agreed to, but the military threw it away and enthroned an over-centralised unitary constitution that exaggerated our differences.

An attempt to go back to the negotiated constitution which gave considerable autonomy to the regions might make them compete in a healthy manner and maximize their differences to achieve a more productive nation, a nation that will grow to be cohesive with mutual exclusion.

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