



## **Cultural Plurality, National Integration and the Security Dilemma in Nigeria**

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**Abstract:** *The cultural plurality of the Nigerian State has been a major factor in the make-up of the policy environment as well as policy frameworks of national leadership from independence. Cultural pluralism could be a uniting or divisive factor, and for Nigeria, it has been more instrumental in the challenge of nationhood, culminating in a Civil War, agitations for state creation, sovereign national conference, rotational presidency, and zoning, and in more recent times, ethnic and religious insurgency as well as terrorist violence. National integration thus becomes far-fetched as it yet remains a quest by successive administrations and non-state actors who are stakeholders in the Nigerian project. But has the context of the external influences and concerns such as migrants, foreign visitors unaccounted for and unwanted aliens as well as their activities in the challenge of nationhood been well addressed? This paper examines the historical and contemporary issues of cultural plurality (often referred to as multiculturalism, although a little different) in the challenge of national unity, with particular attention to the security dilemma for Nigeria in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, paying attention to the growing influence of the unchecked aliens in the swelling question and graver dangers of insecurity posed by unconcerned and unpatriotic aliens who flock into the nation through the porous borders. A descriptive-analytical approach is applied, while the data are basically collected from texts and academic journals. The paper submits that the Nigerian State requires an overhaul of its security machines within and around its borders, while also taking a second and deeper look at its immigration system.*

**Keywords:** *Cultural Diversity, Multiculturalism, National Integration, National Insecurity*

## **Introduction**

The contemporary global system is characterized by culturally plural states, due largely to the rural-urban population flow. Major world economic centres, owing to their commercial importance, are often home to peoples of diverse cultures. Ironically however, African states, considered not too economically viable and regarded from a distance as more culturally homogenous, have the biggest share of cultural mix. The architect of this cultural diversity is the colonial enterprise resulting in mergers and in some cases creation of multiple, culturally incongruent and artificial boundaries. Nigeria has the highest mix of peoples and nations in Africa. The estimated 140 million (NPC, 2006) peoples are divided into over 250 ethnic clusters—small and large. The major Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba ethnic groups find themselves contending for relevance, power and supremacy, while the multiple minor ethnic groups perpetually agitate for identity, recognition, power sharing and resource control. Thus, one hundred years after amalgamation, the polity comprising many peoples and cultures remains in a seemingly unworkable union, the “nation” is absent and remains experimental, while national integration is farfetched.

This paper therefore, examines the issues of cultural plurality—often, erroneously, referred to as

multiculturalism of the Nigerian State— and national integration, and how all of these have ultimately created security gaps and problems that the state continues to grapple with. The historical issues are investigated; the idea of nationhood or national integration is interrogated, while submissions about a general reengineering of the state to enhance unity and national security are attempted.

## **Understanding Multiculturalism, Cultural Plurality and National Integration**

Rosado (1997: 2) defines multiculturalism in an attitudinal perspective, describing it as a “system of beliefs and behaviours that recognizes and respects the presence of all diverse groups in an organization or society, acknowledges and values their socio-cultural differences, and encourages and enables their continued contribution within an inclusive cultural context which empowers all within the organization or society”. This ideal perception of multiculturalism describes a group and community that have, surmounted racial, discriminatory, ostracizing or marginalizing tendencies. This concept suggests that cultural plurality and multiculturalism is a situation that has transcended petty ethnic, religious, class and ideological differences and conflict. It suggests a society that has risen above mundane

primordial considerations and that operates in an atmosphere of social inclusion.

Scholars have argued that multiculturalism queries the concept of national identity, in that, it appreciates and recognizes, without ignoring or turning blind side to the presence of variety of cultural groups coexisting in a particular society. Rather than conjuring a common identity for a widely dispersed groups (Heywood, 2007; Udebunu, 2011), multiculturalism describes the coexistence of numerous cultures, without anyone dominating the others (Wong, 2006; cited in Udebunu, 2011). More explicitly, Garba (2011) sees it as appreciating, tolerating and promoting multiple cultures and identities situated within the confines of a community. Thus, Udebunu (2011) submits that multiculturalism refers to a plurality of cultures. In fact, Takaki (1993) and Yinger (1994) suggest that cultural diversity should be celebrated (cited in Richeson and Nussbaum, 2003).

Multiculturalists argue that in issues of governance, rights of divergent groups are to be respected and cultural identities of ethnic minority groups are to be respected (Taylor, 1992; Kymlycka, 1995). Therefore multiculturalism rides tandem with the principle of equality.

A nation, in this context, according to the World Book Dictionary, may be referred to as “a community of people who share a common language, culture, ethnicity, descent,

or history”. But there is a more complex nation-state where multi-nations are linked under a single political and economic organisation (Ekanola, 2006). Integration on the other hand must be situated in this discourse as a careful and thorough understanding of the fundamentals of the past, conceiving practical steps of what happens after, a disposition to be cohesive, subjected to a mutually agreed programme (Favell, n.d.; Jacob and Tenue, 1964, cited in Ojo, 2009). To Morrison et al. (1972, cited in Ojo, 2009), it is a process of inter-locking linkages where every hitherto dividing boundaries are deliberately dismantled to allow for a more frequent contact, cooperation, consensus and community. Also, Leonard Binder describes integration as involving a high degree of comprehensiveness (Ojo, 2009).

Cultural plurality or pluralism on the other hand, is not devoid of these unique features that underlie mutuality and equality. While it the same as multiculturalism in the sense that it refers to the co-existence of diverse socio-cultural groups in a political entity, it does not represent a community of equal and friendly groups, or an egalitarian society. It is a term used when ethnic groups within a larger society maintain their distinct cultural identities, and their values and practices are only accepted by the wider culture provided they are consistent with the laws and values of the wider society (Science Encyclopaedia, 2007).

An understanding of multiculturalism and cultural plurality will set the tone for our discourse of national integration and will indeed give us an idea of where Nigeria, in view of the challenge of integration, belongs. National integration as a concept can be regarded as a conscious process of creating an interlocking and vertical relationship between and among hitherto separate nations, after an understanding and reconciliation of the fundamental differences and an establishment of an acceptable consensus. Thus, like the concept of multiculturalism, national integration must involve an understanding, respect and appreciation of the differences of the entities being integrated (Nkom, 2008). Multiculturalism is thus an attitude of appreciating and accommodating cultural diversities, while national integration is the process of governing these diversities on the basis equity and justice. If these concepts are clearly understood, one would understand that what is as far as Nigeria is concerned is cultural plurality, but where it should gravitate towards is a multicultural system and by this national integration might be accomplishable.

### **Cultural Pluralism, Multiculturalism and National Integration in Nigeria**

The Nigerian socio-political structure was forcefully assembled by the technological and economically superior British colonial government in 1914, when

the Northern and the Southern protectorates were merged (Ekanola, 2006). This singular act brought together numerous linguistic, ethnic and cultural groups, as well as autonomous communities, sovereign kingdoms and caliphates, which hitherto had attained different levels of economic and political development. These entities with different, many unrelated, cultural, traditional and historical backgrounds were conjoined to form a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-national society. This arrangement was purposed to satisfy imperialistic desires, which primarily, was for colonial administrative convenience as the Nigeria structure did not, in any way, depict nor was meant to lay the foundation for integration; but a mere 'production plant' to meet the needs of the metropolitan economy (Ifeanacho and Nwagwu, 2009), a fact complemented by Shively (2003: 62) who argues that "Nigeria was not constructed for cohesion but for the administrative convenience of the British".

Despite this illegitimate foisting of "Nigeria-hood" on peoples of different nationalities, who did not aspire to become one united entity in the first place, further internal divisions were orchestrated by the colonial lords, who introduced several constitutional methods of divide and rule, and imposed the Hausa/Fulani Emirs on the other ethnic groups (Ifeyinwa, 2002). This, expectedly, gave rise to a sense of

mutual suspicion, distrust, intolerance and conflicts among the ethnic groups, soon after political independence. It is important to note that these exploitative and oppressive actions of the colonial lords also created a crop of elites who initially called themselves nationalists, but who, after the post-independence events, were soon exposed as ethnic leaders, opportunists and power mongers who took advantage of their positions to pursue ethno-religious interests, and to create opportunities for themselves and their ethnic groups, to plunder the country's economy, as well as institutionalizing an ethnic-centred leadership (Ifeyinwa, 2002; Ifeanacho and Nwagwu, 2009).

Ekanola (2006) asserts that the creation of Nigeria as a single territorial and institutional framework expanded inter-ethnic interactions through the practice of colonial system, thereby fabricating a new but common history of economic exploitation, political, administrative, and cultural oppression. Following this artificial creation of a resemblance of multiculturalism (which, in actual fact, was a mere culturally plural society without foundations for genuine integration), the true nature of the created fragile unity played out with multiple cases of mutual suspicion, intolerance, discrimination and hostility, making it difficult to have a true and successful national integration. The crude outplay of ethnic discrimination and struggle

among ethnic groups for dominance or parity were refined in modest policies, including federal character and quota system.

Immediately after independence, ethnic and tribal practices that reared its ugly head right from the colonial period, as demonstrated by the emergence of ethnic-based and regional political parties, began to tear the new state apart. The post-colonial period of 1960-1966 was characterized by clear struggle between the ethnic groups for dominance and control of power at the centre. A multicultural system as we have highlighted was therefore absent; what evolved was a culturally plural state with unambiguous show of brinksmanship among the dominant ethnic groups. Even the ruling party, the Northern Peoples Congress (NPC) was, in name and intent, an ethnic and regional party (Crowder and Abdullahi, 1979). At this period, no attempt towards national integration was made as each political organisation desired to dominate the entire federation from its regional base alone, strictly preventing penetration by other regions. Jackson Larry (cited in Crowder and Abdullahi, 1979) describes this as 'Regional Security', giving an illustration of the late Sir Ahmadu Bello who preferred to lead from his regional base, sending his deputy to represent him at the centre. This clearly runs parallel to multiculturalism, as discussed and can be gleaned from other

multinational political templates, such as the United States of America.

At its inception, one of the emergent political parties, the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) was a national party until 1961 when the reality of regionalism dawned on it. By 1961, it had been able to win electoral seats only in the East, win only one seat in the North and had become dramatically unpopular in the West. Apparently, the Action Group safeguarded the political yearnings of the Yoruba in Western Nigeria. Each of these political blocs jealously guarded its territorial sphere, essentially and singularly, the region (Crowder and Abdullahi, 1979).

Deepening the disintegrative practices of the colonialists, the ruling NPC government fabricated a heated national census figures in 1963 to place the North in a position to perpetually subjugate the other regions and to provide a basis for the fraudulent reallocation of seats after the 1964 general elections into the Federal Parliament (Adeoye, and John, 2005). Beyond the census and electoral manipulations, the dominant Northern ethnic nation sought other means of further multiplying social differences and weakening the strength of opposition political parties in the Southern region. The creation of a new Mid-West region in 1963, though initiated in 1961, became timely tool in 1963 to weaken the support for the Action Group in the Southwest. This view is

in tandem with the observation of Ozoigbo (2010) that “the more Nigeria is divided in smaller units, the more the component units are weaker and the centre stronger”. Also a seed of discord was sown by the Northern political class, in the person of Chief S.L. Akintola, who was the deputy of Chief Obafemi Awolowo, the first premier of the West and leader of the AG. Akintola left the party, denounced his boss, Awolowo and formed the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP), an affiliate of the NPC-led central government (Crowder and Abdullahi, 1979; Ifeancha and Nwagwu, 2009).

By 1966, increased tension had enveloped the entire country, culminating in flashes of violence between the regions and ethnic groups, more particularly between the East and the North. The pogroms or wanton killings in the North of Igbo and Eastern elements, first with soldiers of Igbo extraction in Western and Northern army barracks, culminated in an anti-climax, which led to the hijack of government in January by the army, suspension of the constitution and the ban of all the political parties by Major-General Aguiyi Ironsi (an Easterner). The abolition of federalism and its replacement with a unitary system through Decree 34 of 1966, led to suspicions in the North that the Igbos were attempting to dominate the entire country. In July 1966, the Northern military officers staged a counter coup during which

Ironsi was assassinated and the Igbo elements of the first coup were rounded up and thrown into jails (South East Nigeria, 2012). This ethnic and tribal sentiment permeated the entire fabric of the socio-political system, leading, inevitably and inexorably, to a feeling of rejection, social injustice and social exclusion and ethnic hatred that ultimately led to the Civil War in 1967.

Throughout the fifteen years of military rule in Nigeria that followed the end of the war, there were deliberate attempts to forcefully sustain the togetherness of the diverse ethnic groups by creating a system of government that would harmonize the divergent culture in the country. These included the abolition of regional police; cancellation of state or regional coats of arms and mottos; takeover of regional and state television stations, newspapers; deployment of soldiers as governors or administrators in states other than their own with cultures different from theirs; takeover of Christian and regional schools; establishment of National Youth Service Corps scheme to promote cultural integration of the country's youths who were the leaders of the future; and the introduction of the Federal Character principle to allow for equitable representation in federal institutions and distribution of resources. All of these were measures aimed at conjuring a common national identity to replace the conflict of

culture in the polity (Ojo, 2009; Udebunu, 2011).

Despite the attempts by the armed forces in power to maintain the relative peace of the country, military intervention did not recognize nor appreciate the cultural differences of the colonial arrangement. The military however erred in some fundamental respects and contradicted its own national ideology objective by turning blind eye to Nigeria's cultural, ethnic and religious diversity, and pursuit of policies that directly touched the sensibilities of the culturally conscious peoples. This included the attempt to enrol Nigeria in the Organisation of Islamic Conference in the mid-1980s (Udebunu, 2011). Such acts further undermined the objective of national integration, which is meant to be, like Nkom (2008) posits, a true understanding, respect and appreciation of the differences of the entities being integrated.

### **Cultural Diversity and New Challenge of National Security**

Ironically, the plural nature of Nigeria remains the way it was at amalgamation in 1914. The fundamental differences remain constant, but the only difference is fifteen years of uninterrupted democracy (1999-2014). More ironically is the fact that the same political and military bourgeoisie (the Centre in the Periphery or Compradors, as Marxist scholars would describe political surrogates and arrowheads of the ex-metropoles

or colonialists) are still in power and design the democratic system, the difference being in the seeming integration into existing political parties of persons across ethnic and sectional lines (Ifeanacho and Nwagwu, 2009). It is however important to note that when the issue of cultural plurality is not well managed, it will continue to threaten the peaceful co-existence of the 'nation-state', a term that best describes Nigeria. This untreated or ill-managed issue of national integration has been most instrumental in the challenges of nationhood and the togetherness of these multiple and diverse nations in the polity.

Since amalgamation, the contention of ethnic or sectional domination has dichotomized the country, and one hundred years after, debates over the authoritative allocation of values (*a la* Easton) still remain on the front burner. Several concepts as zoning, rotational presidency and tenure elongation have been introduced by politicians to suit group/class and selfish desires. Ogbu (2001) defines the zoning system as "an equitable sharing of the key political posts, taking the state of origin of the beneficiaries into consideration". The implication of 'consideration of state of origin' will be grievous as it will be an arduous task reaching out, equitably, to the 36 states of the federation and gratifying the over 250 ethnic groups in the states and Abuja. The principle has no doubt created more tension and ethnic

conflict because it places at a vantage point and ensures the domination of the numerically superior and stronger ethnic groups (Okwenna, 2011).

In addition to the problem of ethnicity and tribalism, political class interest has further exacerbated the challenges of national integration (Omodia, 2010). Omodia further argues that prior to elections, the party politics cajole the masses by artificially integrating them into the process of recruitment of political leaders, using tools such as ethnicity; but that shortly after election, the masses are excluded and maligned in polices and dividends of democracy (Omodia, 2010: 14). Again because the democratic process as it is today was manufactured by the military, a military fashion of hierarchical flow of command, power and opportunities is noticeable. The short-changing of the masses by ethnicity inclined politicians, coupled with the heating up of the polity by politics of ethnic selection and ethnic exclusion, have exacerbated the security challenges in the country, particularly from 2009 to 2014.

The unaddressed issues of plurality have continued to give impetus to a growing political consciousness and ethno-religious identity that always culminate in communal and societal conflicts. The fragile peace in Nigeria most often falls apart, resulting in horrible violence. This includes, among other incidences, claim over land and scarce resources

(Berom-Fulani crisis, Ijaw-Itsekiri crisis), power and chieftaincy (Ife-Modakeke crisis), Osu catse system (Umuleri-Aguleri crisis), settlers and indigenes (Jos crisis), Christian and Moslem (violence in Kano and Kaduna) and more recently, the Boko Haram menace (Adagba, Ugwu and Eme, 2012).

Insecurity has reached a record high in Nigeria due to the activities of the Boko Haram terror group, whose mission to Islamize Nigeria has led to over 115 major attacks inside the sovereign state since 2011 (HRW, 2014). The spate of bombings, killings and destructions by the group remains the most potent threat to the Nigerian integration project. The height of insecurity was the shaking of the foundations of the corporate existence of the country by the group's seizure of territories, sacking of military platoons, dislodgment of entire towns and villages, hoisting of a different sovereign flag and declaration of an independent 'Caliphate Republic' in Northeastern Nigeria (Ukong, 2014).

The acts of Boko Haram, coupled with the agitations of the Niger Delta militants before and currently, have reawakened the Igbo of Eastern Nigeria who are beginning to again clamour for secession from the Nigerian State and re-declaration of a sovereign state of Biafra. The free descent to anarchy was however quickly interjected by acceding to age-long call for a national conference, with the government setting up a committee and later

inaugurating the National Conference, which sat and deliberated on wide-range of issues of national social and security concerns, including national co-existence, true federalism, proper funding of the military among other interests.

### **Gravitating from Cultural Pluralism to Multiculturalism**

Nigeria's cultural diversity should have been a source of strength. This is the order of things in multinational states as the USA, United Kingdom (that has Welsh, Scots and English), Canada, Bolivia, Malaysia, Pakistan, India, and the Russian Federation, among others. The multi-ethnic or multinational nature should have been a means to bringing together all of the potentials of the diverse groups for the purpose of national growth and development. This means that there is no sin in being culturally plural; what is 'sinful' is the inability of the groups to recognize and reconcile the differences, see the potential in the diversity, and transform the diversity into strength. While it is clear that the colonial architectural piece remains a 'Hammer House of Horror' for Nigeria, a new consciousness to refurbish the piece or discard it outright, is desirable. If nothing can unite Nigerians, the grave dangers of terrorism and local insurgences should call for unity of purpose to at least, stay alive.

The policies and principles of federal character, quota system, resource control, zoning, rotational

presidency; and the national attitude of polarizing public institutions and occasions by opening and closing prayers in Christian and Islamic traditions, further pulverize, divide and heat up the already fragile polity. The political templates as outlined, including the USA and Britain should be models for the Nigerian multinational state. If the Nigerian peoples cannot co-exist as a nation, there could be peaceful means such as conducting of a referendum for a national decision of what is preferred. Recently, the United Kingdom faced a major challenge of disintegration when agitation in Scotland for a pull-out reached a head. The Scots subjected this to a peaceable referendum and the outcome was such that majority prefers to remain as part of the British union. That settled the issue once and for all and normalcy returned. The Catalonians in Spain are currently asking for their referendum too, to attempt a peaceful pull-out from Spain. Forcing the peoples together in the case of Nigeria is a recipe for future disaster.

## **Conclusion**

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In this paper, we examined the nexus between cultural diversity and multiculturalism, national integration and security as each has played out in Nigeria's political experience. It has to be noted that the security of human life the world over, is aided by an understanding and acknowledging that we live in a multicultural world, and appreciating diversities will create a peaceful environment, with care and attention given to the process of integrating the differences.

It is pertinent to note that the activities that permeated the Nigerian State from independence, such activities by the colonial elite, ethnic nationalists, military bourgeoisie, and political class have been the long dug foundation and recipes for the advent of ethnic conflict, religious extremism and the eventual rise of Boko Haram. The Nigerian experience contradicts the concept of multiculturalism and poses a deep challenge to the country's national security, for, human security is actually most predicated upon mutual respect, peaceful co-existence and equality of social groups.

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