

## **INTERGROUP RELATIONS IN NIGERIA: THE DYNAMICS AND COMPLEXITIES**

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### **Abstract**

Nigeria, as a country, came into existence in 1960 with the British amalgamation of the erstwhile autonomous empires, kingdoms and city states. These political entities had nothing in common other than trade and wars of expansion etc. However, the amalgamation saw the fusion of these political entities into one with the associated interactional pattern between and among members of these distinct ethnic groups. These multi ethno-linguistic groups also reflect the multi-cultural diversities in the country which in turn manifest themselves in the nature of the relationships that exist between and among these diverse ethno linguistic groups in the country. These ethnic groups (Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba, Igbo and the other numerous minority groups) in the country, in their attempt to be relevant economically, politically and otherwise, develop the 'we and they' feeling. The problem may be that it is this 'we' and 'they' feeling or sentiment that has defined the form, manner and nature of the relationships between these federating units (ethno-linguistic groups) in the country (Nigeria). This study attempts to examine the structure of the situation or the condition(s) in which these groups relate or interact and which obviously determines the nature of their intergroup relations. This therefore, involves understanding the nature of the intergroup relations in the country with a commensurate understanding of the nature or the mode of material production/generation and its associated social relations of production in the country. The methodology in this study is library research. It is observed that intergroup conflict is caused by an incompatibility of goals regarding material resources. It is the struggle over such material resources as land, oil, gold, and labour that is the source of intergroup conflict in the country and not ethnicity nor prejudiced personality. This explains the checkered history of intergroup relations shaped by the existing system of material production and appropriation in the country. The study recommends that to strengthen the shattered socio-economic and political relationship between and among the constituent ethno-linguistic groups in the country, there is the need for a restructuring and redirecting of the system of material production/generation and appropriation in the country.

**Keywords:** Intergroup relations, Ethno linguistic, Ethnic groups, Amalgamation, Nigeria

## **Introduction**

Nigeria, as a country, came into existence in 1914 as a product of the British amalgamation of the erstwhile autonomous ethnic groups politically organized into City States (in the North), empires, kingdoms etc. (in the south). These autonomous city states, kingdoms, empires (ethnic groups) existed independent of others politically other than trade and commerce until the amalgamation cum colonization. However, with the exit of the British colonial masters heralded the independence of Nigeria in 1960.

It could be deduced from the above that Nigeria as a country is composed of various ethnic groups federating in the political entity called Nigeria. It has about 250 ethno linguistic groups, the major ones among them being the Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa/Fulani (see Otite, 1990). These multi ethno-linguistic groups also reflect the multi-cultural diversities in the country. These multi-cultural diversities manifest themselves in the nature of relationships that exist between and among these diverse ethno linguistic groups in the country. The diversity has and is still being reflected in the form and nature assumed in these intergroup relations. According to Muhammad, et al. (2006), “regional location and religion have served to reinforce the tripartite cleavage of the three dominant ethnic groups (Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa). British colonial rule reinforced these regional and cultural differences. These disparities have been a source of intolerance, discrimination, political tension and instability ever since”. The questions then are, why the disparities in the first instance and why are these disparities reinforced by the so called regional and cultural differences? Why must these disparities become a source of intolerance, discrimination, political tension and instability ever since in the country? An answer to these requires an understanding of the historical antecedents and antitheses to the formation of the country called Nigeria. This is because such an understanding will give an illumination into the nature and why the complexities in the relationship between and among the various interacting ethnic groups in the country.

## **Conceptual Clarification**

**Intergroup relations** The term *intergroup relations* refers to both individual interactions involving members from different groups and the collective behaviour of groups in interaction with other groups, at either the intra or inter organizational level. The classic definition of intergroup relations was originally provided by Sherif (1966) who suggested: “Whenever individuals belonging to one group interact, collectively or individually, with another group or its members in terms of their group identification, we have an instance of intergroup behaviour.” Intergroup relations imply therefore, the existence of mutually exclusive groups that are in constant interaction with one another. These mutually exclusive groups due to the mode of their social bond usually exhibit the ‘we’ attitude toward members of their mutual group while exhibiting the ‘they’ attitude to the other members of the out-group.

**Dynamics** This is a force that stimulates change or progress within a system or process; Of a process or system characterized by constant change, activity, or progress; Pertaining to or characterized by energy or effective action

(<http://www.oxforddictionaries.com>). It here connotes a process and stimulants to change. It involves the various forces within and outside the system (country) that synthesize in stimulating the nature and mode of intergroup (ethnic groups) relations in the country.

**Complexities** This stands for intricacies. It also means complications. In the context of this study, we will be looking at the intricacies and the complications associated in the interactions of the different multi ethno-linguistic groups in the country. What are the complexities and how did these intricacies emanate in the first instance? These are begging questions.

### **Theoretical Perspectives**

Intergroup relations, as a subject matter, have been subjected under various/varied theoretical expositions. It should be noted that various theories have attempted to explain intergroup relations as a subject matter. However, for a clear understanding of the causes, dynamics and complexities of the intergroup relations in Nigeria, it is therefore imperative that a review of some of the contending theories on intergroup relations be undertaken.

**Social Identity Theory** This is one of the major theories on intergroup relations.

This theory was originally formulated by Henri Tajfel in the 1970s. The other great exponents of this theory are; Flament (1971) and John Turner (1982). The Social identity theory is predicated on the assumption that an individual develops his/her self-concept on the basis of his/her attachment to a significant group (Hogg, 2006). In other words, a self-awareness of an individual is dependent on the individual's membership to a significant group. By the individual's membership to the significant group, the individual's self-concept is developed and actualized. This implies then that an individual is just but a reflection of his group membership. Buttressing this, Moss (2008) posits: "When individuals are cognizant of their social identity -- aware of the groups to which they belong -- their perceptions, inclinations, and behaviour can change dramatically. First, they become more inclined to embrace the beliefs and demonstrate the values that epitomize their group. Second, they become more likely to perceive individuals who belong to other groups as demonstrating qualities that typify members of this collectivity. If they perceive a collectivity as thrifty, for example, they become inclined to interpret the behaviour of a specific member as miserly rather than generous. See also Hogg & Terry (2000), Ellemers & Spears (2002). Being a group member, his actions are but also, a reflection of his group membership action(s). Therefore an understanding of the individual's actions/behaviours demands a commensurate understanding of his group membership actions/behaviours.

From the social identity theory view point, the perceived individual's behaviour is patterned by the group's behaviour acting on the individual as a significant other (Frisch, Hausser, van Dick, & Mojzisch, 2014). More so, this patterned behaviour emanates as a result of the social bond between and among members of the group. This goes further in reinforcing the social bond and solidarity amongst the members of the

group. This reinforcement consequentially creates a 'we-feeling' for the in-group and a 'they-feeling' for the out-group members arising from self-categorization. This view has been corroborated by Brewer (1986), who in his study of the minimal and maximal group revealed that "the only thing necessary to create prejudice and discrimination between groups is a relevant and salient self-categorization or social identity". To him therefore, it is the individual's identification with his in-group that significantly shapes his self-image and the associated behaviour pattern which invariably determines his interaction/relationship with other members of the out-group. "Again, it is crucial to remember in-groups are groups you identify with, and out-groups are the ones that we don't identify with, and may discriminate against" (McLeod 2008). His self-categorization with the attendant status conferment and legitimation as earlier stated further reinforce the 'we' and the 'they' feeling. In affirmation to this, Brewer (1986) posits that, "Just the awareness of belonging to a group that is different than another group is enough to create prejudice in favour of the in-group against the out-group". It may sound strange as revealed from the above assertion that just the mere membership of one in an in-group is just but an enough justification for one to exhibit prejudice and discrimination against a member of an out-group. The fact however remains that in the Nigeria context, the question of an individual's group membership, affiliation and sentiment to a reasonable extent influences if not determines the nature of the intergroup relations in the country. It is a truism therefore that the mere fact that an individual has an affinity and so can be identified with a group automatically places him at an enemy position with the members of the other group. A critical look at the intergroup relations in the country reveals this. The three major ethno-linguistic groups in the country (Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo) are at daggers drawn with each other by the mere fact that the members of these groups are just from these groups. In the country, it is a common phenomenon to either see the Hausa prejudice the Yoruba and the Igbo and/or vice versa. Each of them exhibits the 'we' feeling toward members of their own group at the expense and detriment of the oneness, unity and the development of the entire country, Nigeria. It is a daily incident in the country to notice/observe a member of an ethnic group curry an unmerited favour from a fellow member of the same group. Reason being: group membership, sentiment and affiliation. This alignment focus engenders bitterness, hatred and bickering among the members of the various ethno-linguistic groups in the country. This explains the high level of nepotism and favoritism in the country. This 'we feeling' and sentimental attachment to ethnic cleavages can best be explained by our attitudes and behaviour captured in the Nigerian popular slogans; *'na my countryman/brother, whether he good or bad, lefam for me, una turn don pass, dis na our turn jor. Wetin wey borda my brother borda me too'*.

The outcome of this ethnic group sentiment, affiliation and loyalty rather than national sentiment, affiliation and loyalty is the slaughter of meritocracy. However, this theory is of the view that a harmonious ethno-linguistic relationship can be promoted and enhanced by eliminating those thin lines of differential identifications and affiliations which tend to create the 'we' feeling towards the in-group and the 'they' feeling to the out-group. Where this line of social identification and its attendant social affinity is eliminated, social interaction is bound to be peaceful and harmonious. The

question however is, can social interaction ever be devoid of social identification and affinity? Can there ever be a social interaction between and among socially distinct multi-cultural groups that is devoid of any feeling of 'we' and 'they'?

**Contact Hypothesis** The other approach which has attempted to explain the relationship between and among varied groups in a society like Nigeria is what is known as the Contact Hypothesis. The theory posits that increasing physical contact between members of different groups will most likely increase their changes of non-discrimination and prejudice among these varied group members. This supposition is predicated on the assumption that the relationship will be based on status equality and on a cooperative circumstance. The assumption here is that the earlier prejudicial attitude held by members of a group against the other group will gradually give way for a non-prejudicial and non-discriminatory attitude and behaviour if there is an increasing physical contact among these members and also if the relationship is based on equal status and on a cooperative circumstance. In other words, the interacting individuals must be equal in all circumstance and the relationship must be on the part of cooperation and not on competition. The belief therefore is that where the physical contact is asymmetrical and competitive, rather than a positive relationship or outcome, the result will be negative. Rather than a mutual and harmonious relationship, conflict, antagonism and hostility will be the other of the day.

While it cannot be disputed that this approach has lent an insight into the understanding of intergroup relations, its recommendation however is presumptuous in that its predictions are based on suppositions which in many circumstances may not be held constant. It should be noted that all physical contacts that are of equal status may not necessarily lead to a peaceful or harmonious intergroup relationship most especially when there is a distinctive and conflicting group feelings, identity and ideology. More so, interactions/relationship between and among members of distinctive ethnic/linguistic groups, most often, are more competitive than complementary. So, a harmonious relationship as anticipated and envisaged under this preposition is most seldom achieved.

Juxtaposing this therefore to a pluralistic country like Nigeria becomes problematic in that actions and inactions by members of the various ethno-linguistic groups in the country are always viewed with the eye of ethnicity, language or religion. There is hardly any action or inaction by members of the groups that is devoid of these interpretations. Under such circumstance, competition other than complement is most visible. Under this circumstance too, antagonism, conflict and hostility other than peace and harmonious relationship reign supreme. This situation can be likened to that in Lokoja as posited by Audu (2009), "The interactions and cooperation amongst the various intergroups in Lokoja made the town a multi - ethnic one with features like conflict, hostility, domination of migrant groups, indigene-ship and citizenship". Can we also imagine a situation where there is a physical contact among interacting intergroup members but in an atmosphere or environment of scarce resources? In such an environment, rather than complementarity as envisaged by the Contact hypothesis, competition and hostility will assume ascendancy in that it will attain the status of the

theatre for the survival of the fittest. In such circumstance, parochial sentiment and affinity become most prominent in shaping the nature and form of the relationship entered into by members of these ethno-linguistic groups in the society/country. This therefore explains the need for the in-depth x-ray and understanding of the etiology, structure and composition of the Nigerian society.

**Realistic Group Conflict Theory** The other theoretical perspective to the understanding of the dynamics and complexities of the multi ethno-linguistic relations in the country is the realistic group conflict theory. This theory sprang up in the 1960's. Its emergence marked a new line of thought in the field of intergroup relations. The emergence of this theory saw a dramatic shift or refocus of scholarly attention and analysis of intergroup relations from the previously dominant personal characteristics of the individual(s) to the structure of the situation. Here, emphasis shifted from analyzing intergroup relations from the point of view of the individual personal characteristics to the structure of the situation. In other words, rather than try to understand the relationship between and among various multi-cultural groups from the stand point of the differences in the personal characteristics and attributes of the various participants in the various groups, focus rather should be in understanding the form and nature of the structure and the situation informing the relationship.

This line of thinking was greatly espoused by scholars like Sherif (1966), Harvey and White (1961). To these scholars, human behaviour in a group context or interaction is not influenced or determined by the personal characteristics or attributes of the individual but by the structure of the situation. To understand the behaviour of an individual or group of individuals in an interaction situation demands an appropriate understanding of the structure of the situation or the condition(s) in which the individual or group of individuals relate or interact. According to Sherif (1966), taking an insight from social psychology, is of the opinion that 'it is the structure of the situation, not the personal characteristics of the individual (or an aggregate of individuals) that determines human behaviour'. In furtherance, he posits that "intergroup conflict is caused by an incompatibility of goals regarding material resources. It is the struggle over such material resources as land, oil, gold, and labour that is the source of intergroup conflict, not personal characteristics like a prejudiced personality". This view is a radical departure from the earlier view being upheld by the Social identity theory which tends to look at intergroup relations from the stand point of the 'we-feeling' derived from the membership of a distinct social group. The Realistic group conflict theory rather than view it from this angle, looks at the relationship of individuals/groups in a multi-cultural society from the economic base. This perspective upholds the view that the struggle for scarce material resources in the society is the fundamental root cause of conflict in the society. To understand intergroup relations within the context of a multi-cultural society therefore demands a commensurate understanding of the economic or material base of the relationship. In other words, what is the mode and nature of material production in the society? What is the mode of material distribution, and appropriation in the society? It is these modes of production, distribution and appropriation of the material resources that inform the mode and nature

of the relationship of individuals and/or groups in a multi-cultural society. In this context, group identification is narrowed and subsumed in goal(s) incompatibility in resource distribution/allocation and appropriation. It is therefore in the course of production, distribution and appropriation of material resources that the nature and form assumed by an intergroup relation is established.

This perspective is a veritable tool for analysis in the study and understanding of the nature/patterns of intergroup relations in a multi-cultural society like Nigeria and so is appealing to this study. It is appealing in the sense that it enables us to dissect the nature of the intergroup relations in the country. It equally enables us to understand the form and shape assumed by intergroup relations in Nigeria. Is the relationship cordial/harmonious or antagonistic/conflict laden? What is/are the fundamental cause(s) of this nature of relationships and the way(s) forward? This study will attempt a discuss on these contending issues raised. It is obvious therefore that to understand the nature of intergroup relations in Nigeria, one must of necessity understand the nature of material resources production, distribution and appropriation in the country. It is by so doing that we will be able to understand why ethnic sentiment and rise of ethno-militias in the country, why religious bickering in the country, why the cry for resource control and the practice of 'true' federalism etc. in the country. Without an understanding of the materials resources base of the country, a true understanding of the nature of the intergroup relations in the country may be problematic and distorted. While not discountenancing the role of group social identification and the posturing of a positive individual/group image in the configuration of intergroup relations in the country, it will be pertinent to consider the forms and nature of the relationship arising from the material production, distribution and appropriation/expropriation by individuals/group in the relationship. This directs us to asking: what is the economic base of the country? Who are the economic actors in the country? What are their interest(s)? How does this interest inform their individual/group relationship and how does this in turn shape the form and nature of the groups' relationship? A consideration of these fundamental questions enables us to understand the root cause(s) and also the forms intergroup relations in Nigeria assume. The realistic group conflict theory situates within the context of the prevailing material resources production, distribution and appropriation in the country. It upholds that in the course of material production, distribution and appropriation, individuals/groups enter into socio-economic relationship. This relationship can be cordial or antagonistic. However, this relationship is antagonistic arising from the unequal and exploitative nature of the relationship. It is this conflict ridden relationship and its resultant nature and outcome that are of interest to the approach.

To the Nigerian context therefore, conflict is an endemic factor or phenomenon in the relationship between the various multi-ethno-linguistic groups in the country. If conflict has been inherent so far in the relationship, why the conflict we may ask? This is a fundamental question. It is by addressing the fundamental cause(s) of conflicts between and among the various ethno-linguistic groups in the country that cordial relationship can be obtained and maintained. This is the cardinal tenet of the theory and fundamental too. Sherif, Harvey, and White's (1961) work at Robber's Cave was a

seminal demonstration of detailed predictions of the theory. 'Throughout the experiment, it was the structure of the situation that dictated behaviour rather than personal preferences. A resolution to conflict was obtained by addressing the conflict situation itself rather than using more interpersonal avenues like improving relationships between the leaders or other group members'. From the above, it is therefore obvious that behaviours are dictated by the structure of the situation rather than personal preferences or group social categorization. This therefore calls for the understanding and unraveling of the 'structure of the situation'.

### **Historical Configuration of Nigeria**

Nigeria is a creation of the British colonial master and so a child of circumstance and master - minded by the British arc-colonialist, Lord Fredrick Lugard.

It is important to note that before the arrival and amalgamation of the various ethno-linguistic groups that eventually make up the country call Nigeria, these various multi-ethno-linguistic groups existed as autonomous and independent political entities (kingdoms, empires, city states etc.) only relating and interacting on the bases of trade, commerce and wars of expansionism. However, the contradiction in the capitalist system of production in Europe heralded Europe expansionist move to 'spheres of influence' and jurisdiction in the other parts of the world and most especially Africa. It will be emphasized that it is this capitalist drive for spheres of influence so as to actualize their quest for extended market, cheap labour and cheap raw materials that culminated in the eventual annexation, colonization and amalgamation into Nigeria of the various multi-ethno-linguistic groups. This amalgamation was done with military fiat and impunity without consultation and the consent of the amalgamated independent political entities. This is nothing other than a 'rape of the self-will and identity of the people'. Such a fusion and union amounts to nothing other than a mere aggregation. No wonder the late Chief Obafemi Awolowo sarcastically but ingenuously described Nigeria 'as a mere geographical expression'. This implies that Nigeria has a body but has no soul and spirit.

Amalgamation then was just but a mere fusion and union of the land mass (body) of the hitherto independent political entities without a commensurate fusion and union of the will and conscience (soul and spirit) of the people. Is it therefore a marriage of 'inconvenience'? The obvious fact is that such an arrangement may not bear the test of time. No wonder the multi-faceted challenges (terrorism, ethnic militias, religious conflicts, ethnic conflicts etc.) confronting and threatening to pull down the nation.

Various constitutional conferences had been and are still being organized in the country aimed at forging a union or nation of people with body, soul and spirit, all appear To prove abortive. It is in this light that there has been a glaring call from people in several quarters for the convocation of what is popularly referred to as the sovereign national conference. This conference, it is presumably believed, holds the magic wand for the 'true' fusion and union of the various multi-ethno-linguistic groups federating in the country. Since Nigeria is in a democratic dispensation, can't the legislative assembly, the National Assembly, address the 'national question' being clamored upon

rather than the convocation of the people oriented sovereign national conference? Won't this conference amount to a waste of the nation's time and resources since its mandate falls within the same mandate of the National Assembly? Is it that the national legislators lack the political muscle to venture into supposedly sensitive national questions? The issue remains that the national question undermining the peaceful co-existence of the various ethno-linguistic groups in the country demands an answer and urgently too.

It is of interest to note that the call for a sovereign national conference has been interpreted in some quarters to mean a call for the disintegration of the country into its supposedly federating entities and so disfavored. This position however, has achieved nothing other than engender suspicion, hatred and conflict between the various ethnic groups in the country and most especially the three dominant ethnic groups in the country. It is pertinent at this juncture to ask, who is afraid of the convocation of the sovereign national conference bearing in mind that its primary purpose is to forge a formidable strategy or modality for the peaceful co-existence of the various multi-ethno-linguistic groups in the country. It could be that the convocation might turn out to negatively impact on the peaceful co-existence of the various ethno-linguistic groups in the country hence, the perceived fear and rejection. The need for a peaceful and harmonious co-existence between the groups in the country cannot be over emphasized.

### **Nature of the Ethno-Linguistic Groups' Relations in Nigeria**

Nigeria as earlier pointed out is a child of circumstance in that it was the creation of the British colonial government. Before the amalgamation, these kingdoms and city states were engaged in wars of attrition supposedly aimed at territorial expansion and economic appropriation. The relationship between these ethno-linguistic groups masquerading in the various domains was gruesome and antagonistic and sometimes outright hostility as evident in the various wars as the Egba-Egbado wars, the Yoruba civil wars etc. However, the amalgamation saw an end to these altruistic expeditions.

Amalgamation ushered in a new form of inter-group relations where by these various groups were merged into a single geo-political entity - country/Nigeria. It could be recalled that this merger being politically/economically motivated was coercive in nature and having no due consideration of the will/spirit of the people and the consequent implication(s) of the amalgamation. Because of the economic pervasiveness of the amalgamation, rather than have a peaceful cementing of the various ethnic groups in the country, it has further heightened and intensified ethnic and religious cleavages and animosity among the people. Buttressing this, Ayinla (2006) posits, "Regional location and religion have served to reinforce the tripartite cleavage of the three dominant ethnic groups (Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa). British colonial rule reinforced these regional and cultural differences. These disparities have been a source of intolerance, discrimination, political tension and instability ever since".

The nature of inter-group relations in Nigeria can further be understood within the context of the British colonial political policy of Direct and Indirect Rule system. This political system of direct rule in Southern Nigeria and indirect rule in Northern

Nigeria was a policy intended to divide and rule/exploit the people, created a feeling of “we and they” among the people and so polarized the country. This “we and they” sentiments and the polarization of the country have remained a veritable source of suspicion, tension, hatred, conflict and hostility between the various ethnic groups in the country. Therefore the British colonial political/administrative policies of direct and indirect rule system, while it helped maximize political and economic gains for the British colonialists, the resultant inter-group relations in the country was the polarization of the country and people and intensification of suspicion, hatred and sometimes out-right hostility. Therefore, a strengthening of the relationship between these ethno-linguistic groups in the country demands a re-addressing of those policies that have the tendency and capacity to polarize the country and its citizens.

Apart from the role of the British colonialist in fostering divisive tendencies in the country arising from their political/administrative policies of direct and indirect rule, the role of the emergent nationalists like Chief Nnamdi Azikiwe, Alhaji Tafewa Balewa, Alhaji Saduana and Chief Obafemi Awolowo etc., in their bid to outwit others and gain political power, further sowed the seed of suspicion, hatred and hostility in the country. These founding fathers of an independent Nigeria, in their quest for power rather than unite the people by forming a national party with a national out-look, formed an ethnic - based political parties with ethnic - based followership. This is reflective in Chief Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe’s National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) but mostly in Chief Obafemi Awolowo’s Action Group (A.G) and Alhaji Tafewa Balewa/Saduana’s Northern People’s Congress (NPC). Apart from Zik’s party that seemed to have a resemblance of a national party, others like Awolowo’s and Tafewa’s never made a pretense of their ethnic sentimentality in their respective political parties. While it could be said that Zik preached “nationalism” (really?), Awolowo and Saduana preached “Omo Oduduwa and Arewa” respectively. These political actions unintendedly polarized the country and the people along ethnic, religious and political divide. It was this polarization that culminated in the 30 months Nigeria civil war arising from the aborted secession of the Igbos (Biafra) from the country with its after-mat implications. Lamenting on the ugly incidence arising from the strained ethno-linguistic groups relations in the country, Ayinla (2006) posits, “in relation to Nigeria, one of the greatest and most inhuman problems of inter-group relations witnessed in the country’s political history is the civil war (1967-70). Under the leadership of Col. Odumegwu Ojukwu, the Eastern region seceded, declaring itself the Republic of Biafra. Thirty months of civil war began in July 1967, claiming more than a million lives and devastating the Eastern region”. Though General Yakubu Gowon declared no victor, no vanquished at the end of the civil war in order to cement a cordial relationship between the aggrieved ethnic groups in the country, this has not succeeded in achieving that noble intension. History and recent happenings in the country have proved otherwise. Nigerians are still basically divided along ethnic and religious lines with the attendant manifestation of suspicion, hatred and conflict/hostility.

The introduction of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) by General Yakubu Gowon was intended to ameliorate the ugly incidence of suspicion and hatred between the various ethnic groups (Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa/Fulani) engendered by the

civil war in the country has recorded but a little success. The calling for the scrapping of the scheme by the people arising from the recent happenings in the country whereby Youth Coppers serving mostly in the Northern part of the country are no longer safe/secure give room for concern. Various military interventions in the country's political history have equally not helped matters as political positions are shared based on the principles of ethnicity and religion without which that government, be it military or civilian, will lack legitimacy. One therefore can only feel safe and secure only but among his own (ethnic) people. Ayinla, et al (2006) puts it thus: "in Nigeria today, ethnic discrimination has become a chronic social disease, in fact a canker worm, which has eaten deep into the heart of Nigerians".

Most recently, the nefarious activities of the Fulani herdsmen have further added a stain on the already fragile inter group relations in the country. In their attempt to maintain their nomadic economy and lifestyle, they infringe on the rights and privileges of their host communities, thereby giving rise to suspicion and hostility. The Nimbo, Uzo-Uwani community, Oke Ogun and Agatu crisis in Enugu, Oyo and Benue states respectively readily come to mind and further attest to the strained relationship between the various ethnic groups in the country.

### **Cause(s) of the Strained Ethno-Linguistic Groups Relationship in Nigeria**

Despite the public masquerading and the showmanship of Nigeria as a united and indivisible country, it is of concern that the relationship between and among the multiplicity of the ethnic and religious groups in the country gives room for worry. Why the suspicion, hatred, animosity, conflicts and hostility? Why the bickering and divisions in the country? Addressing these questions demands a fundamental x-ray of the root cause(s) of the strained relationships between the various ethnic groups that make up the country. Various postulations – political, economic, ethnic, religious etc. depending on the individual's scholarly persuasion - exist on this.

However, an x-ray of the problem reveals an economic explanation of the situation. It is economic, in the sense that the material existence of the people detects, to a very large extent, the nature of their intergroup relationships. Karl Marx, the great German scholar in his postulations, was of the opinion that man's material existence (the economy or substructure) supersedes all other existences (the superstructures). That man in the struggle for material existence shapes all other relationships there-in.

Taking a cue from this, it is interesting to stress that an understanding of the root cause of the strained ethno-linguistic group relations in the country can best be understood within the context of material resources production/generation, distribution and appropriation. Here lies the bone of contention and the nature of the intergroup relations in the country.

Historically, in pre-colonial Nigeria, the various inter-tribal wars (the Yoruba wars, Edo wars etc.) fought mostly were economically motivated. They were wars of territorial expansionism aimed at economic maximization in terms of war booties inform of royalties and farmlands appropriation.

Again, the British amalgamation of the Southern and Northern Protectorates into the country known as Nigeria with the resultant intergroup relations is unarguably

economically inspired. The British government desire to minimize administrative cost and maximize economic gains from the country necessitated the amalgamation, the direct and indirect rule system with the attendant relationship in the country.

The pogrom of 1967-1970 (the Nigerian civil war) though seen from various perspectives has mostly an economic undertone than whatever explanation(s). It is this same material condition of existence that was posed as the explanatory variable for the Niger Delta militancy by its apologetics. The Niger Delta militancy (armed struggle) was supposedly born out of the demand by the people of Niger Delta for the control of the mineral resources from their region. The strained relationship between the people of Niger Delta and the other regions of the country (ethnic groups) resulting to the armed conflict was as a result of their perceived economic exploitation and marginalization. The recent clashes between the Fulani herdsmen and their host communities (mostly farmers) can also not be devoid of this interpretation and explanation – the material conditions of existence. The Fulani herdsmen want to preserve their source of livelihood (cattle) just as their host communities (farmers – crops). While not providing any justification, it is however in the bid for each to protect and preserve their material condition of existence that stimulate the incessant hostilities between them.

### **Conclusion**

The conflicts in the country may assume ethnic, political or religious coloration as deemed fit by the elites, the fact remains that outside the struggle for the material condition of existence, the relationship between the various ethno- religious groups in the country will be more of cooperation than competition, peaceful co-existence than conflict/hostility. This position finds support in the assumption of the Realistic group conflict theory that; intergroup conflict is caused by an incompatibility of goals regarding material resources. It is the struggle over such material resources as land, oil, gold, and labour that is the source of intergroup conflict, not personal characteristics like a prejudiced personality. Why prejudiced personality if not competition for advantage over material resources. In conclusion therefore, the nature of the intergroup relationship in the country can best be understood within the context of the ongoing material production/generation, distribution and appropriation.

### **Recommendations**

From the foregoing, it is obvious that Nigeria as a country has had a checkered history of intergroup relations shaped by the existing system of material production and appropriation in the country. Therefore, to strengthen the shattered socio-economic and political relationship between and among the constituent ethno-linguistic groups (Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba, Igbo and the other minority ethnic groups) in the country, there must be a restructuring and redirecting of the system of material production and appropriation in the country. The system that gives credence to exploitation and marginalization of the resources of a weak ethnic group by a more dominant and powerful ethnic group does not encourage a harmonious intergroup relations in the country and so, should be reconsidered. This calls for equity in resource allocation.

Secondly, the principle of 'true' federalism should be upheld and sincerely practiced as against the so called federal system presently being practiced. Federalism will ensure a peaceful and cordial relationship between the constituent ethnic groups that make up the country.

Finally, for a peaceful and cordial relationship between the various ethnic groups in the country, the principle of cultural pluralism should not only be seen to be preached, but should be the order of practice in the country. It should not only be enshrined in the constitution but should be a guiding document of practice for all.

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