

FORGING NATIONAL INTEGRATION THROUGH PHILOSOPHIC INTERROGATION OF CULTURES

Ifechi J. Ndianefoo, Ph.D
Department Of Philosophy
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

Abstract

About 100 years ago the various nationalities and tribes inhabiting the coastal and Sahel regions of West Africa were amalgamated into a single geo-political entity called Nigeria. The government of Nigeria celebrated 100 years of the amalgamation last January. Two events occurred in the teeth of the celebration which respectively demonstrated the two intractable problems that have bugged the development of Nigeria: mal-administration and disunity. There was the commotion caused by the national honors awardees scrambling and engaging in fist-cuffs over the medals which were less in number than the awardees. There was rigorous and suffocating security screening which enshrouded the venue in an eerie atmosphere of security scare. This paper argues that the recipe is philosophical re-orientation towards instituting liberalism (in the original sense of the word) as national ethos. It is also argued that liberalism is a philosophy of freedom and justice upon which anvil great civilizations have been forged and great civilizations broken when they turned against it. The conclusion is made that Nigeria can achieve liberalism through philosophic interrogation of her peoples' cultures and in that stride attain greatness. This paper employs the methods of philosophical analysis and hermeneutics to attain its research goals.

Keywords: Forging, National, Integration, Interrogation, Culture.

Introduction

It is helpful to introduce this discourse by giving a bare outline of the concept of culture and the political formation known as the Nigerian federation.

Culture

The concept “culture” has undergone a long evolution and has, therefore, acquired an elasticity of meaning which the reader need not be bordered with. It will suffice, therefore, to bring to attention the essence and sense of culture thus: it is the way of life of a people, their traditional behavior in a broad sense, including their arts and artifacts. It is the social heritage which an individual acquires from his group. As Professor Okere figuratively puts it, “culture is our man made environment. Culture is an artificial extension of biology, culture is a totality of our self-expression, it is the evidence we can leave to posterity that we have been. It is our footprint on the sand of time. It is the stamp of humanity on nature as created by God...” (1983:31).

Nigerian Federation as a Pot pourri of Conflicting Ethnic Nationalities

The Nigerian state came in to being with the amalgamation of 1914 which corralled the extant ethnic nations into single political and administrative entity. Thus Nigeria is a federation and as such is multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, multi-cultural and multi-religious polity.

There is no agreement in the extant literature as to the accurate number of ethnic nations that make up the Nigerian federation. While some maintain that they are up to 240 or 250 ethnic nations, others suggest that they are less than sixty (Adejuyibe, 1970). Those who maintain that Nigeria contains up to 240 to 250 ethnic nations, use the language boundaries as criterion of classification. But Iwaloye and Ibeanu (1997:51-54) argue that using language boundaries solely as a basis of classification of ethnic nations in Nigeria is completely unsatisfactory. They contend that a more realistic classification has to be based on geographical space, the relative size and topographical continuity of the language units. On the basis of these criteria, therefore, six ethnic nations can be identified.

Whichever criteria are used in classifying the ethnic nations, the point remains that Nigeria is comprised of many ethnic nations whose interests cross and conflict. Such conflict have more often than not resulted to many crises amongst which were Shagamu-Kano conflict, the pogrom against the Igbos which climaxed in the Nigerian civil war, the Zango-kataf crisis of 1992, the intermittent Maitatsine crisis which ravaged Kano until the 1990s, the June 12, 1993 election crisis, the Jos crisis in 2011 and the current Boko Haram insurgency in the Northern parts of Nigeria.

These ethno-religious crises have exerted a mortal wound on Nigeria's body politic: nepotism, corruption, ethnic hatred, suspicion and tension. Public policies, citing of developmental projects, promotion in the armed forces and public service and success in politics are influenced by ethnic considerations. Ethnic hatred, suspicion and tension have equally given rise to emergence of radical ethnic organizations which struggle for power and influence in contemporary Nigeria and, in so doing, weakens the integration, unity and stability of the country. Such ethnic organizations include the Oduduwa People's Congress (OPC) of the Yorubas, Arewa Consultative Forum of the Hausa-Fulanis, Movement for the Actualization of Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) of the Igbos, Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) of Ogonis and the Niger Delta Frontier Force of the Ijaws. How can ethnic hatred, suspicion and tension be doused? Seeking an answer to this question leads us to the consideration of the dialectics of culture and philosophy as an instrument for mediating and harmonizing conflicts and tension.

The Dialectics of Culture and Philosophy

To appreciate the role of philosophy in interrogating and regulating cultures and integrating them in a heterogeneous nation-state like Nigeria, it is necessary to come to terms with the robust dialectics that obtain between culture and philosophy. Dialectics is an age-long theory of development which posits that contradiction, rather than bringing growth or development to a halt, acts as a positive

driving force precipitating a leap to higher stages. It is a quasi-mystical principle adumbrated by the ancient philosopher, Heraclitus of Ephesus, in 6th century B.C in the following words: “war is common and justice is strife and all things happen by strife and necessity (Stump, 1977:16). From this perspective, he concludes that “what is in opposition is in concert and from what differs comes the most beautiful harmony”. It fell to the Prussian state Philosopher, Hegel, to give an elaborate articulation of this quasi-mystical and logical principle of development in his famous idealist philosophy of.

The dialectical tension existing between culture and philosophy becomes manifest against the backdrop of the definition of culture given in the foregoing as the totality of a people's beliefs, ideas, attitudes, artifacts etc, that is, their *weltanschauung* and the formal conception of philosophy as individual critical questioning of the fundamental beliefs, assumptions and practices of our age. In this light, culture is a collective a communal property while philosophy is essentially an individual enterprise and a radical questioning of the collective thought and vision of the society. By reflecting on and questioning this collective thought and vision or culture, one makes an individual effort to find or give meaning to one's world. It is quite irrelevant to philosophy if it founds a school or is used as an instrument of some imperialism.

In the history of thought, this dialectics between culture and philosophy has been dramatized by the judgment and death of Socrates. By philosophizing, Socrates was questioning, whether rightly or wrongly, the accepted *weltanschauung*, the culture. His open avowal or advocacy of his philosophical views was interpreted by the Athenian authority as a corruption of the Athenian youth because he questioned and inculcated in the people the habit of questioning Athenian culture. Still reflecting on Greek philosophy as a source of the individualistic nature of philosophy in contrast to the communal nature of culture, we find that in spite of the obvious

affinities and continuities it is clear that Aristotle's philosophy is not identical with that of Plato. Thus, as Okere observed, to the extent that philosophy is an individual effort it must also be an individual philosophy and, therefore, there are then as many philosophies as there are philosophers (1983:7).

The individualistic and critical nature of philosophy in contrast to the communalistic or collectivist nature of culture is evident also in traditional African World. According to Professor Wiredu, among the traditional folks of Africa uninfluenced by modern education, there are genuine philosophers, people capable of fundamental reflection on the world views of the community and such people do not merely recite the world views of their communities. They are able to subject these world views to criticism and modification. More than this, they support their views or ideas with reasons or arguments and are “capable of conceiving and rationally recommending ideas, offering alternatives to the commonly accepted opinions and practices” (quoted in Oladipo, 1996:26).

Professor Okere buttressed the above views of Wiredu on the tug between philosophy and culture by maintaining that “philosophy is not a cultural universal to be simply presumed a priori to be part of every other culture. It is, of course, perfectly possible that among some other peoples, especially those without art of writing, there may have been or there may still be some unrecorded, inglorious Socrates, some Platos and Aristotles blooming unknown in an unappreciative environment (1983:IX).

Finally, the dialectical tension existing between culture and philosophy is rendered tellingly and eloquently by Bertrand Russell, the renowned British philosopher, logician and mathematician thus: the circumstances of men's lives (culture) do much to determine their philosophy but conversely their philosophy does much more to determine their circumstances” (culture) (1956:15). In Russell's account of the tug between culture and philosophy, the latter exercises more force on the former. History

bears out such domination. At certain historical junctures, philosophy had always played the role of redeeming anti-thesis of culture: Socrates was a gadfly to the culture of mass obduracy in Athens of his time. Luther King's philosophy was liberating anti-thesis to the racist culture of America of his time; French Revolution's philosophy of "liberty, equality and fraternity" was an anti-thesis to, and vanquisher of, the culture of barbaric oppression and exploitation of the majority by a few propertied or educated elite.

But philosophy has not always exerted more force than culture in the tug between it and the latter. History shows a ding-dong struggle between philosophy and culture which, figuratively speaking is an undulating historical tapestry. Nonetheless, the ground for placing hope on the side of philosophy in its tug with culture is that even though philosophy does not vouchsafe to us any absolute truth, it affords us critical reflection or rationality to make critical preferences amongst competing cultures.

National Integration through Philosophic Interrogation of Cultures

The dialectics of culture and philosophy considered in the last section contained within it the seeds of the role of philosophy in integrating a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, multi-cultural and multi-religious federation like Nigeria through critical interrogation of the cultures of the constituent ethnic nationalities. It is not intended to list all the cultures including the sub-cultures of the constituent ethnic nationalities of Nigerian federation and explode them seriatim.

Such endeavour will not only be unwieldy vis-à-vis the scope of this discourse, but will also amount to dissipation of time. A bare acquaintance with Nigeria's history since independence invariably shows that the country is a third-world state dominated by the pre-literate culture of ethnicism or tribalism, superstition, primordial strife, religious bigotry and post-colonial culture of endemic

corruption, scavenging and politics, prebendal politics, authoritarianism and anti-intellectualism.

There is no doubt that there has always been national revulsion against these social cankerworms in the national life of the country. The country's coup leaders since independence had harped on them as their reasons for their so-called interventions, the clergymen harp on them regularly in their homilies as obstacles to spiritual growth and national development, the social critics denounce them daily in street corners as pitfalls of national liberation and national development (Ndianefoo,2009:142).

The inability to disconnect and the extirpate these social cankerworms from their strangle hold on the very fabrics of the country's national life and culture has been blamed on two causes which are alleged to be fundamental, namely, bad leadership and unwieldy or poorly integrated federation. These causes are also alleged to be militating against the cultivation of patriotism and progressive national spirit that will foster a modern national culture necessary for survival in our contemporary world.

I disagree most fervently with the view that bad leadership and poorly integrated or unwieldy federation are the fundamental causes of the Nigerian predicament. The fundamental cause of the Nigerian predicament is *cultural*. In the words of Oladipo,

There is thus abroad in Africa today a cultural crisis, which is very disabling. The essence of this crisis lies in the fact that Africans have not been able to create an appropriate cultural framework for building a new and humane society on the continent. It does not require much reflection to see that it is the lack of this essential foundation for decision-making in a society that is at the root of the development crisis in Africa. An important question in African development, then, is that of

how to renew African cultures in a manner that would make it possible for them to provide the framework of thought and action within which Africa's developmental problems could be tackled (2009:14-15).

In the light of Oladipo's observation, it is clear that the Nigerian masses' yearning for a humane social order cannot be realized unless a fundamental cultural reappraisal and renewal is brought about. This is where philosophy in its function as a critique of culture comes in.

As a third world country, the larger bulk of Nigeria's population is illiterate and this class constitutes the Nigerian masses who need philosophic interrogation of their cultural repertoire more than any other segment of the population. This is a situation where the country's National Orientation Agency would have been more active in offering citizenship education to complement the extant adult education and nomadic education programmes. But unfortunately, the Agency is nothing more than a political campaign organ of any government in power.

The Nigerian masses constitute the majority of the country's population and are ipso facto also the bride of unscrupulous politicians who seduce them with cash and food hand-outs during election because their support is decisive in any election by reason of their predominant population. This segment of the population who are unfortunately in the majority need the philosophical enlightenment that the wealth of the society is a common wealth which the government must distribute equitably; that the government has a social contract with the people it governs; and that the politicians who dole out cash and food items to them during elections do so as shrewd 'political investors' and are not altruists.

Beyond the peculiarity of this illiterate segment in relation to their exploitation by the politicians, they are, like the rest of the

population, susceptible to the above-mentioned social cankerworms or negative aspects of our culture which have contributed to the country's underdevelopment. Perhaps the aspect of the country's national life or culture which calls for urgent redress is corruption. Nigeria is a notoriously corrupt country not only by the indices of Amnesty International and other integrity monitors but also by daily the pillage reported by the media.

The problem of corruption is correctly and squarely put on the quality of the country's political leadership. Much ink has been poured and hue and cry made over this problem. The country's political leadership is constituted by persons who have no deep philosophical will and understanding of man and society. The consequence is unenlightened leadership which has equally mounted a dubious process of leadership recruitment by assimilation or corrupt enticement. The situation is not helped by their twisted jurisprudence which vests the power to prosecute corruption on the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) which are mere quislings of the executive arm of government. The consequence is that corrupt practices never get punished as these agencies pick and drop charges in accordance with changing political fortunes of their suspects. A philosophical revolution in the country's culture is invariably a desideratum to clean the Augean stable.

Another aspect of the country's culture which invites philosophical interrogation is the authoritarian feature in our body politic. Traditional African culture which we inherit by birth and socialization is authoritarian. This authoritarian trait was manifested in the unquestioning obedience by people in traditional African societies to the authority of elders who were believed to be the repositories of knowledge and wisdom. There was in traditional culture a heavy reliance on authority as a method of validating beliefs. The reason for this situation, as Professor Wiredu points out, can be found in the nature of traditional society itself. According to

him, "Traditional society was founded on a community of shared beliefs in the wisdom of the age, the sanctity of chieftaincy and the binding force of the custom and usages of our ancestors" (Quoted in Oladipo, 1996:47)

It is indisputable that there was much in the authoritarian orientation of traditional culture that stifled its intellectual development. This authoritarian mentality remains a feature of the Nigerian society. Examples abound in the tendency of public officials to refuse to entertain questions about some established procedures of the institutions they serve, thinking that the mere facts these procedures exist is enough justification for them, or the attitude of some political leaders who equate power with wisdom and would always want to regard their own answer to a problem as the right, at times, the only answer. But no society can survive in the contemporary world with this kind of mental outlook which is anti-reason.

The acquisition of philosophical knowledge and inculcation of philosophical attitude would cure the authoritarian trait (which is part of our traditional heritage) and militarism which long years of military rule has imparted to the country's psyche and culture. Philosophy, in its essential character, inculcates in us the habit of independent analysis and criticism. It is a field in which one is allowed, almost, without any bounds to present his views, engage with others in debating the merit or otherwise of such views, answering objections, and restating one's view while taking due account of these objections (Oguejiofor, 2001:143). This practice, in long run, gives rise to an attitude, a very healthy one, of inclination to listen to, or consider the point of view of the other, to take it as a matter of fact that he has the right to his opinion, no matter how erroneous it may be. In brief, the most characteristic philosophical attitude is a counter to dogmatism. This makes us to be well aware of the non-definitive nature of whatever theory or view we put forward.

It is indisputable that if philosophy is infused in our national life or

culture by deliberate government policy and increasing education, the critical and undogmatic attitude which philosophy imparts on its votary will drastically reduce bigotry and fanaticism both on the political and religious fronts. Needless to add that such diminution in bigotry and fanaticism in our country's culture will bring about corresponding decrease in the sectarian crisis in the northern parts of the country and intra-faith strife and splitting in the southern part of this country as well as douse ethnic and political tension and violence which have unfortunately become a feature of our national life since independence in 1960.

By way of comparison and analogy, it is noteworthy that religious crusades and violence in Europe abated with the rise and dominance of philosophy and science in their culture. This is why today there is no incidents of religious fanaticism and sectarian crisis in the West and other developed parts of the world.

No less philosophical interrogation and cleansing are needed to extirpate tribalism and its associated evils of nepotism and oppression from Nigerians national life or culture. Tribalism as a negative quality of the mind is translated to actions in relations with others. The supposed national ethos of unity in diversity which hints at accommodation and harmony amongst the diverse peoples and cultures of Nigeria has remained meaningless jingle to some people and a painful reminder of disappearing ideal to others.

Despite the establishment of the National Youth Service Corp in 1976 and the legislation of quota system in the country's constitution (both of which aim at respectively engendering unity and fairness) the supposed national ethos of unity in diversity has not percolated into the country's national life or culture. The reason, as a national commentator, Tatalo Alamu, puts it, is that "there is a normative free fall in Nigerian". Philosophy formulates and grounds norms. But where Nigerian politics and political parties are bereft of philosophy or ideology one cannot expect the philosophy of unity and diversity as antidote to tribalism and its associated evils

to percolate into the people's psyche and eventually into the political culture particularly. Again Tatalo Alamu, a national writer and commentator, reflecting on the whimsical party defections amongst the politicians of Nigeria's Fifth Republic expressed the country's underpinning intellectual climate in the following words:

The current mass defections and borderless gallivanting among the political class may well signal final death knell of ideological politics in contemporary Nigeria. To discerning Nigerians, there may not be much difference between the APC and PDP. Sir Olaniwun Ajayi, the revered Afenifere patriarch, has dismissed both the PDP and APC as platforms of predation and primitive accumulation.....The hurricane of mass political suicide has finally berthed on our shores. The ideological neutering of a polity often results in the neutering of political strategy and methodology with all parties resorting to the same methods and measure. For a developing society, this is the real tragedy of the collapse of ideological politics. It is a one- party state by any other name with the parties no more than bickering factions of the same political monopoly. (The Nation on Sunday 31, August, 2014, P.3)

It is also the parlous intellectual climate which is, to say the least, anti- philosophy which explains the political violence that has become a feature of politics in Nigeria, a situation which has constrained many politically competent and intellectually

formidable patriots to avoid politics. A mention of some recent cases of political violence will not be out of place as they show that one is not writing from the figment of one's imagination: the power tussle between governor Rotimi Amaechi of Rivers State and his erstwhile chief of staff, Nyesom Wike which spilled over to the floor of the State House of Assembly in the last quarter of 2013 resulted to physical fight (in which many legislators were grievously wounded) and suspension of legislative business for quite over three months. Political thugs reigned terror on a court session in the high court of justice in Ado-Ekiti Ekiti State on September, 22 and 25, 2014. The court was hearing a case against the governor- elect, Mr. Ayo Fayose. The police men on duty did not save the situation. It was either they connived at it or were over powered. The National Judicial Council issued the following statement on the incident:

“Council,

I. In very strong terms condemned the attacks on the judiciary and judicial officers in general across the country and in particular, the one carried out in high court complex, Ado-Ekiti on 22nd and 25th September, 2014.

ii. Requested the inspector-General of police to take over and investigate the alleged attacks on Hon. Justices John Adeyeye and Isaac Ogunyemi, some members of staff of the court and vandalizing of property of the high court of justice, Ado-Ekiti and bring the culprits to justice”

(The Nation on Sunday 5, October, 2014, P.67)

In close sequence, political thugs attacked the legislative quarters of Edo House of Assembly on night of October 12, 2014 and wounded some legislators and members of their families and destroyed cars

and houses. Similar attack had occurred at the floor of the House during its sitting some months ago. Some legislators sustained serious injuries.

These perverse features of the country's national life or culture unmistakably show that philosophical habits of mind have not significantly permeated the country's national psyche and culture. Philosophy is reputed in its training of the human subject in rationality. Rationality here means the ability to make right judgments in relation to available alternative lines of action. The man who has no tincture of philosophy goes through life imprisoned in the prejudice derived from common sense, from the habitual beliefs of his age or his nation and from convictions which have grown up in his mind without the cooperation of his deliberative reason. A country whose population is dominated by such people will be underdeveloped.

In our contemporary world, science and technology are not only highly prized but have become imperative for development strides of any society. The critical, analytic and independent caste of mind which philosophy imparts on its subject is *sine qua non* for cultivation of democratic culture on which democracy as a veritable system of government thrives.

Philosophy, through its contemplative attribute which is addressed to large questions of general import frees man from parochialism, bigotry and instinctive life style. The life of the bigot and instinctive man is shut up within the circle of his interest. Such a man does not and cannot comprehend let alone practice the concept of patriotism, a social virtue necessary for national interest and national survival. Finally, although not exhaustive of the interrogative and regulative function of philosophy, it is virtually indisputable that philosophical knowledge and attitude carry with it some good dosage of moral training. Philosophy is apt to exert the right moral influence on its votary. In projecting this function of philosophy, Professor Omeregbe made reference to Marx and Rousseau to show what

influence philosophers can have on their society (1990:194-195). Although this claim is subject to debate, it can hardly be denied that the exposure to moral thinking which philosophy affords its votaries ultimately feature in the moral consciousness of the individual. Such influence is a healthy one and necessary for the society's cultural advancement.

Conclusion

The civilizing function of philosophy in any cultural milieu is indisputable. Philosophy's legacy to the modern world is the fostering of liberalism. It is therefore necessary for a developing and multi-cultural and multi-ethnic country like Nigeria to inculcate philosophical habits of mind in her citizens through the educational process and cultural programs. The interrogative and regulative functions of philosophy discussed in this essay have rubbished the skepticism and nonchalance of the average man towards philosophy. It has also been shown that philosophy is not a recondite and abstract discipline it is sometimes taken to be. Philosophy has invaluable and theoretical relevance in any society. It is a part of the society's cultural fabric as well as its cultural molder and stabilizer.

References

- Adetuyibe. O, (1970) "Ethnic Nations" Seminar Paper, Department of Linguistics, University of Ibadan.
- Asiegbu, L.C. "Philosophical Basis of Ethics: The African Experience" in I.T.K. Egonu (ed.) Readings in African Humanities. Oweri: Vivians and Vivian Publishers, 1988.
- Dewey, John. Reconstruction in Philosophy. Boston: Beacon Press. 1957
- Iwaloye and Ibeanu in F.U. Okafor ed. New Strategies for Curbing Ethnic and Religious Conflict in Nigeria, Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1997.
- Ndianefoo.I.J. "The Role of Philosophy in Nurturing and Sustaining National Culture" in Okediadi, Uche and Okeke eds. Themes in Nigerian Peoples and Cultures. Enugu: John Jacobs Publishers, 2009.
- Oguejiofor, J. Obi Philosophy and African Predicament. Ibadan: Hope Publications, 2001.
- Okere, Theophilus African Philosophy, London: Lanham, 1983.
- Olusegun, Oladipo. Philosophy and African Experience. Ibadan: Hope Publication, 1996.
- Olusegun, Oladipo. Philosophy and Social Reconstruction in Africa. Ibadan: Hope Publications Ltd., 2009.
- Omoregbe, Joseph. Knowing Philosophy. Lagos: Joja, 1990.
- Opata, Damian "Towards a Humanistic Definition of Culture" in I.T. K. Egonu ed. Op. Cit.
- Popkin Richard and Stroll Avrum, Philosophy Made Simple. London: W.H. Allen, 1969.
- Russell, Bertrand. Portraits From Memory and Other Essays. London: George Allen, 1956.
- Steward.D. and Blocker H.G. Fundamentals of Philosophy. New York: Macmillan, 1983.