

TOWARDS OVERCOMING ETHNICITY IN NIGERIA FOR NATIONAL INTEGRATION: LESSONS FROM KARL POPPER'S THOUGHTS ON TRIBALISM

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Abstract

There is a seeming consensus that ethnicity or tribalism constitutes a very formidable factor among others militating against the emergence of needed national cohesion for peace and development in most Nation-States of post-colonial Africa. In Nigeria particularly, almost all facets of life have the imprint of ethnicity. This work is aimed at articulating Popperian thoughts on tribalism which he considers as a nostalgic feeling of those who are daily wishing the return to that era of unreflective normativity thereby constituting themselves as the enemies of the Open Society or the forces of globalisation. The paper seeks to highlight the implications of Karl Popper's thought pattern on the rise of ethnic chauvinism, regional activism and religious bigotry in a pluralistic Nigerian society and to critically evaluate the challenges it poses in Nigeria's quest for national integration in view of advancing the way forward. This work is methodically critical, evaluative and historical. The data for analysis are sourced chiefly from existing literature such as books, journals, encyclopedias, periodicals, monographs and Internet sources.

Keywords: Karl Popper, Tribalism, Ethnicity, Globalisation, Nigeria, National Integration

Introduction

The history of Nigeria as a nation is replete with the perennial struggle for national integration and cohesion as a result of tribalism or ethnicity and to some extent, regionalism. The Nigerian founding fathers in acknowledging the socio-cultural diversity and heterogeneity of Nigeria never contemplated it to constitute an albatross in Nigerian quest for national integration. This spirit was captured in a famous line of Nigerian anthem at independence that "though tribe and tongue may differ in brotherhood we stand". This was an assertion of the fact that out of many ethnic groups and nationalities in Nigeria, you would still wield a sense of brotherhood and national cohesion. Ironically, historical facts and current happenings have demonstrated that tribalism or ethnicity is increasingly becoming not only intellectually respectable but also underpinning the basis of political mobilisation, bestowal of political

patronage and in fact, a hallmark of our interaction as a people. This reality is ably captured by one of Nigeria's finest literary Icon Chinua Achebe in his celebrated work; *The Trouble with Nigeria* thus; “Nothing in Nigeria's political history captures her problem of national integration more graphically than the chequered fortune of the word tribe in her vocabulary”¹ Tribal consideration has impacted maximally on Nigeria's political history. It has trampled down on meritocracy in favour of mediocrity; hence, in most cases, excellence paved way for tribal affiliation as a criterion for appointments and other considerations. But for the liberal intellectuals this development is not only embarrassing in the age of globalisation but it is also militating in our quest for national integration.

For Karl Popper; tribalism represents a deliberate attempt to turn one's back on the worldly features that have undermined the naturalistic or magical attitude to social norms in order to recover the lost sense of tribal unity and stability typical of the closed society as against the open society that now describes our contemporary and globalised world. When he introduced the idea in the '*Open Society*' Popper associated tribalism with collectivism with an emphasis on the supreme importance of the tribe without, which the individual is nothing at all”². For him, the open society sets free the critical powers of man and liberates him from the tribal and closed societies of the past.³ That tribalism is an enterprise of those who seek nostalgically to lead us back to the lost dawn of tribal solidarity and also to return to forms of normativity that are not reflective or comparative or critical.⁴ The problematics are; what is tribalism or ethnicity? What are the factors that breeds ethnicity in Nigeria? How can Nigeria's quest for national integration be realised in this age of globalisation? Can Popperian thoughts on tribalism and the politics of cultural recognition help our discourse on ethnic challenge in Nigeria? Can our findings and submissions in this work facilitate the course of national integration in Nigeria?

It is from this background that this papers seeks to expose the Popperian thoughts on tribalism and the politics of cultural recognition in view of advancing ways of curbing the rise of ethnicity in the quest for national integration in Nigeria in the age of globalisation which Popper describes as “*The Open Society*”.

1. Achebe, Chinua. *The trouble with Nigeria* (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishing co. Ltd, 1983) p.5.

2. Popper, Karl. *The Open Society and its Enemies*, Volume 1. (Princeton, Nj: Princeton University Press, 1996).9.

3. Popper, Karl. *The Open Society and its Enemies*, p.1

4. Popper, Karl. *The Open Society and its Enemies*, p.59

Understanding the concepts of Ethnicity and Tribalism as Synonyms

It is pertinent to note that the concepts of ethnicity and tribalism are employed here as synonyms and are used interchangeably. Both terms encompass the behaviour of ethnic groups particularly in the context of competition and clamour for recognition. In the words of Ukoha Ukiwe “ethnic groups are groups with ascribed membership usually but not always based on claims or myths of common history, ancestry, language, race, religion, culture and territory.”⁵ Tribal or ethnic groups are one of the earliest forms of social and political systems and the consciousness of it is not intrinsically bad. This is because the concept of tribe or ethnic group from which tribalism or ethnicity is rooted is one of the known institutions that characterised the ancient human history. From its ancient origin ethnicity has been generally seen in terms of a group setting and associated with the idea of nationhood. This is because etymologically, the word “ethnic” from where ethnicity comes from is a derivative of Latin from the Greek *ethnos*, which means nation or race. It is a feature of the human society right from the time of Plato and Karl Popper acknowledged this fact. In “*The Open Society and its enemies*” first published in 1945, Popper refers to the ancient society as a tribal or closed society and he sees the present civilisation as a transition from that society to the open society which sets free the critical powers of man.⁶ But the concept of ethnicity or tribalism is employed to denote the behaviour, attitudes and loyalties that result from belonging to an ethnic group or tribe and the mobilisation of ethnic identity to gain political advantage in situations of competition.⁷ It is in this sense that;

In Nigerian context, ethnicity or tribalism is defined as social phenomenon associated with the identity of members of a competing communal group(s) seeking to protect and advance their interest in a political system. The relevant communal factor may be language, culture, race, religion and/or common history⁸

Thus, ethnicity is not so much a matter of “shared traits or cultural commonalities but the result of the interplay between external categorization and self-identification.”⁹ Sequel to our conceptualisation of ethnicity, it is obvious that ethnicity can only be employed in context of diverse and pluralistic social groups each struggling to gain advantage over another or to attract recognition, political patronage and greater socio-political participation. This is because social pluralism will always lead to differences of interests, and which consequently breeds the possibility of ethnic conflict to emerge. No wonder then, there is a sustained

5. Ukiwo, Ukoha. “On the study of Ethnicity in Nigeria”. <http://www.crise-ox.ac.uk> (accessed July, 03 2008)

6. Popper, Karl. *The Open society and its enemies. Vol.1. The spell of Plato .p.1.*

7. Agundu, Oliver Tersoo. “Ethnicity, Regionalism and the Politics of Recognition” FAJ. Faculty of Arts Journal. Vol.5 (2008),p.53.

9. Adeyanju, Collins. “Politics of Ethnicity in Nigeria: The Way Forward”

growth of ethnicity in Nigeria considering its diverse and multi-cultural groups each seeking for recognition and greater political participation at the central level.

The Rise of Ethnic Nationalism in Nigeria

The concept of ethnicity itself is as primordial as human evolution since people are born into specific cultures within certain political and geographical space. But why this concept has taken a new dimension in the socio-political activities in Nigeria remains a thing of worry in her quest for national integration. Many scholars have hinged the rise of ethnicity in Nigeria to colonialism, elite manipulation and social injustice in the land. But the fact is, Nigeria's federation as it exists today has never been a homogeneous entity. This is because as Kerker J observes “it's widely different peoples and tribes are yet to find any basis for true unity... but for administrative convenience, northern and southern Nigeria became amalgamated in 1914”.¹⁰ This asserts the point that the rise of ethnicity in Nigeria is rooted from colonialism. Corroborating, Welsh noted that “the precipitation of ethnic identities becomes incomprehensible if it is divorced from colonial rule”.¹¹ It is in the same thought pattern that Walter Rodney submitted.

What came to be called tribalism at the beginning of the new epoch of political independence in Nigeria was itself a product of the way that people were brought together under colonialism so as to be exploited. It was a product of administrative device of entrenched regional separation of differential access by particular ethnic groups into the colonial economy and culture¹²

According to Rodney ethnic consciousness or tribalism is a natural human activity which is a phase in the evolution of a people. But when it ceased to be transient and became institutionalised in Africa (and Nigeria in particular) it is because colonialism interrupted African development.¹³ This is the view corroborated by Olatunji A. Oyeshile where ethnicity is seen as the by-product of colonial activities in Nigeria nay Africa. In his work “*Reconciling the self with the other: An existentialist perspective on the management of ethnic conflicts in Africa*” published in 2005, he observed that:

Colonial and military incursions into the African body politic have fuelled the flames of ethnicity, to the extent that the concept Ethnicity has come to be identified with the ignoble, backwardness, conflict and underdevelopment.¹⁴

This is also the view shared and expressed by Welsh, D. in his work “*Ethnicity in Sub-saharan Africa*” where he opined that “the precipitation of ethnic identities becomes incomprehensible if it is divorced from colonial rule.”¹⁵ He further noted that ethnicity is not a “natural cultural residue but a consciously crafted ideological creation”.¹⁶

10. Kerker, Joseph. “*Tribalism and the Quest for unity in Nigeria in the 21st century; A Christological approach.*” Faculty of Arts Annual Conference Proceedings, Makurdi (1998),P.105.

11. Welsh, D. “*Ethnicity in Sub-Saharan Africa*” Journal of International Affairs Vol.72 No.3 (1996)37.

12. Rodney, Walter. *How Europe underdeveloped Africa.* (Dar-es Salaam publishing House Limited, 1972).

13. Rodney, Walter. *How Europe underdeveloped Africa.* P.251

14. Oyeshile, Olatunji. *Reconciling the self with the other: An Existentialist perspective on the management of Ethnic Conflicts in Africa* (Ibadan, 2005), p. 10.

15. Welsh, D. “*Ethnicity in Sub-Saharan Africa*” In International Affairs, Vol.72, No.3(1996),p.58.

16. Welsh, D. “*Ethnicity in Sub-Saharan Africa*”,p. 58

Although many scholars as seen above have blamed the rise of ethnic nationalism on colonialism, but its flourishing in the post-colonial Nigeria is traceable to the activities of the ruling elites who see it as a cheapest way of rallying their kith and kin for personal political gains. Concurring, Bade Onimode, opined that “This argument is based on the ethnic relations inherited from the colonial past and nurtured by contemporary bourgeois politicians who want power based in communal hegemony”¹⁷ Relatedly, Odugbeme sees it simply as “the absence of elite consensus on power sharing and cohabitation in Nigeria”.¹⁸ According to him, Nigeria has been and remains a consensus problem but it is not the common people who cannot live together.

It is the elites, or the different elite formations that fan the flames of ethnicity in the competition for power and resources. If the elite formations were to work out a formula for co-existence Nigeria would settle down more quickly than a glass of gulder.¹⁹

In addition to the above, the factor of social injustice is also identified as the potent force behind the rise of ethnic nationalism in Nigeria. Many ethnic groups feels that they are not represented in the scheme of things at the Federal level. According to Kalu, “Most agitations in Nigeria are about participatory rights within the context of liberal constitutionalism that guarantees citizenship as the dominant identity, political and economic freedoms of actions”²⁰

The above only suggests that no ethnic group in any state must be marginalised in the sharing of power and resources of the state. If one feels marginalised the possibility of conflict is high. And this can be done by mobilising such ethnic sentiments to gain advantage. Corroborating, Oyeshile observed that

The likelihood of conflicts in a multi-ethnic society where there is injustice in the allocation of resources and the sharing of political power is on the high side and this often leads to ethnocentrism which is a tendency to project one's own group as the centre of everything desirable while neglecting other groups.²¹

Such ethnocentrism often leads to deep rooted prejudice on the part of the domineering and dominated groups. This prejudice is expressed in tribalism or ethnic nationalism.

The Impact of Ethnicity in Nigeria's Quest for National Integration

Ethnic nationalism and tribal sentiments have above all things militated against the emergence of Nigeria's nationalism. It has constituted itself as an albatross to Nigeria's

17. Onimode, Bade “*Class struggles as a reality of Nigerian Development*” In *Path to Nigerian Development* ed. Nnoli Okwudiba (Dakar: Codesinia, 1981)

18. Odugbemi, Sina. “*Ethnic Nationalism and the Future of Nigeria*” In *Recall: A Chronicle of Nigerian Events*, ed. Oladipo Olusegun (Ibadan: Hope Publications, 2001)67.

19. Odugbemi, Sina. “*Ethnic Nationalism and the Future of Nigeria*” In *Recall: A Chronicle of Nigerian Events*, p. 67

20. Kalu, K.a. “*Echoes of Instability: Implications for State, Society and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria*” *The Constitution: A journal of Constitutional Development*, Vol.5, No (2005)31.

21. Oyeshile, Olatunji A. *Reconciling the Self with the other: An existentialist perspective on the management of ethnic conflicts in Africa* (Ibadan; Hope Publications, 2005),p.12.

quest for national integration and cohesion. According to Odugbeme, “everything is viewed from an ethnic prism; very few matters can be viewed outside of it”.²² This ethnic configuration has resulted in the weakening of the federal government. According to Odugbemi, ethnic identity has resulted in a low level allegiance to state authority. Several people and groups are overtly challenging the state authority through all sorts of militias. It has become the case that issues of national interest are no longer considered on their merits but on how they affect the ethnic groups or regions. With deteriorating security situation in the country, many regions and states are now clamouring for state police or regional security outfit to protect the lives and properties of their people in the face of seeming incapacitation on the part of the federal government who controls the security structure of the country.

This development is seen by many as the eloquent testimony of leadership failure and errors in leadership recruitment processes occasioned by ethnicity and other related factors that have conspired to elevate mediocrity above merit and ability. This has manifested terribly in poor governance in experienced at all levels in the country. It is in this respect that Ben Okwu Eboh has bluntly identified ethnicity as one of the causes of poor governance in Africa in general Nigeria in particular. In his article “*Improving Governance in Africa: An ethical re-orientation*”, Eboh observed that “tribal sentiments are stumbling block to good governance because when tribal sentiments are fanned by politicians, the tribes pitch camps against each other”.²³ According to him the leader who fans the embers of tribal sentiments do so in order to get the support of the members of his/her tribes in his/her desire to get into power. He further contends that: “As long as tribal sentiments override the rule of law then the governance of people falls into the hands of leaders who have thrown the rule of law to the winds”.²⁴

Individual ethnic groups now pursue their goals to the exclusion of the general welfare of others. This has metamorphosed in consistent and increasing agitation for ethnic self-determination in the context of multi-cultural Nigerian society to the detriment of national integration. Today, almost all average Nigerians reasons from the praxims of tribal sentiments. This unfortunate reality has even found manifestation in the voting pattern of Nigerians.

According to the Report of the National Opinion Survey of International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), Washington DC, an independent survey of public opinion in Nigeria states ethnicity as the strongest type of identity among Nigerians sampling 48.2%, as compared to 28.4% occupational identities, while 21% identify themselves with a religion. This is more or less a confirmation of the obvious. The correlation between ethnicity and the electorate is identified on aggregate and this shows that an electorate have tendency to concentrate his/her vote along discernible ethnic lines²⁵

With this thinking, merit is sacrificed to ethnic sentiments. According to Obi Oguejiofor “in many African countries, the common man expects his brother in high office to seize the opportunity of his high position to became rich. He will be a hero if he becomes rich and is considerate enough to help his relatives from his wealth”²⁶. But it must be noted that no

22. Odugbemi, Sina. “Ethnic Nationalism and the Future of Nigeria” In *Recall: A Chronicle of Nigerian Events*, p. 67

23. Eboh, Okwu Ben: “Improving Governance in Africa: An Ethical Re-Orientation” *Uche*: Vol.10. July (2004),p. 43.

24. Eboh, Okwu Ben: “Improving Governance in Africa: An Ethical Re-Orientation”,p.43

25. Adeyanju, Collins. “Politics of Ethnicity in Nigeria: The Way Forward”p.1

26. Oguejiofor, J.O. *Philosophy and the African Predicament* (Ibadan: Hope Publications, 2001),p. 24.

country has strived with this kind of thinking. Hence, Chinua Achebe asserted that “no modern state can lend its support to such prejudice without undermining its own progress and civilization”²⁷. In the words of Jamieson in his book “Boundaries and Belonging: states and societies in struggle to shape identities and local practices” this is even more imperative in multi-ethnic societies especially with:

The growing complexity of modern societies in which only few people still live in a world that comprises only their own kind and their own set of cultural values and customs.²⁸

In other words, with increasing contact of various cultures and ethnic groups in modern nation-states, with diverse set of values like the case in Nigeria the imperative of national integration becomes paramount

As long as ethnicity survives in Nigeria's socio-political landscape the hope of an integrated and mutually coexisting Nigerian federation will remain a case of chasing shadows.

Karl popper's life, influences and thoughts on Tribalism (Ethnicity)

Karl Raimun Popper is one of the most controversial and influential philosophers of the twentieth century. He was born on 28th July, 1902 at Himmelhot, in the district of Vienna to his parents Simon and Jenny, both of Jewish origin but converted to Lutheranism in 1901. He grew up in an atmosphere that was academically and intellectually oriented. According to him, it was “decidedly bookish”²⁹. His father Simon was a lawyer and his mother Jeny Schoff, came from a family in which music was enthusiastically cultivated. This stimulating climate favoured a spontaneous interest in books, but also in the political events that marked his early adolescence and culminated in the First World War and the ensuing collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.³⁰ In 1918, he enrolled at the University of Vienna, but it was in 1922 that he finally sat the entrance examination (the matura) and became a properly matriculated student.

In 1925, he started to attend the pedagogic institute, where he met, among others the woman who would later become his wife in 1930 and always be close to him in his work.³¹ Popper's fame came at his years in Canterbury, New Zealand. He impressed many people by his philosophy of science and his political philosophy. Commenting on Popper's achievements at Canterbury, John Eccles wrote that he heard “marvelous stories...about the academic stir that was being made by a philosopher, Karl Popper in Canterbury University College at Christchurch.”³² In 1949, Popper became a Professor of Logic and Scientific method in the University of London. It was in London that he lost his wife in 1985. Karl Popper has published many works including, *The Logic of Scientific discovery*, (1934), *The Open Society and its Enemies* (1945), *The poverty of Historicism* (1944), *Conjectures and Refutations* 1962) among others. Karl Popper is neither a continental philosopher, neither a conventional analytic philosopher. His thought pattern can be best appreciated if seen in his attitude to logic, his coherentist epistemology and his anti-nationalism.³³ Popper died in

27. Achebe, Chinua. *The Trouble with Nigeria*. P.7. Jamieson, J. “Boundaries and Belonging: States and Societies in the Struggle to shape Identities and Local Practices. *Journal of Social, Political and Economic Studies*, Vol.29 No.3(2004)373.

28. Popper, Karl. *Unended Quest An Intellectual A*

29. Popper, Karl. *Unended Quest An Intellectual Autobiography*. (London: Routledge 1992),p. 5.

30. Popper, Karl. “*Un-ended Quest*, p. 72.

31. Popper, Karl. “*Un-ended Quest*, p. 72.

32. Eccles, J.C. “*My living Dialogue with Popper*” In *Pursuit of Truth*. ed Levinson P. (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1982) p.221

33. Corvi, Roberta. *An Introduction to the Thought of Karl Popper* (London: Routledge, 1997),p.6

London on the 17th September, 1944. He remains one of the most influential philosophers of the twentieth century. His criticism of tribalism has formed the theoretical frame of this work.

This decisive encounter revealed to the young Popper the different between dogmatic attitudes seeking verifications and critical approach seeking not confirmation but crucial tests. So, in 1919, Popper was convinced that what distinguished the scientist was the critical attitude.³⁴ In his quest for philosophical and critical knowledge, he read Kant's critique of pure reason and prolegomena which to some extent sharpened reasoning prowess. However, it was Herbert Feigl, who after a night long discussion, had a major influence on Popper's philosophical future by encouraging him to write up his ideas in book form.³⁵

It also worth noting that the Vienna circle was born in the city where Popper lived and studied. Though, he never officially identified with them and to some extent appeared to be polemical in relation to them, but he shared its members "Enlightenment attitude and critical view of philosophy".³⁶ However, he later claimed that the objections contained in his first work actually killed off logical positivism.³⁷ But he noted that it was at most a question of manslaughter rather than premeditated murder. Corroborating this thought pattern, Dahrendorf argues that Popper's works in both political and epistemological theory "makes him the champion of a form of neo-Enlightenment anti-romanticism with obvious roots in Kant and the eighteenth century."³⁸ Similarly, D.E. Williams in his study of Popper's social and political thought maintains that his ideals are essentially those of the Enlightenment and that the arguments he deploys against ostensible enemies are strongly inspired by Kantian philosophy.³⁹ For Popper's determination to treat human beings as "ends in themselves" underlies the whole of his thought, even in the field of epistemology, the choice of one among several competing theories is never just an intellectual question but always also a moral decision. It is again argued that it was the "culture Clash" that summarily allowed Popper to develop the clarity and trenchancy of argument that are now universally attributed to him.

Popper on tribalism and the politics of cultural recognition

Karl Popper's thought on tribalism is expressed in his work "*The Open Society and its Enemies*". It is tempting to read Popper's critique of tribalism as nothing more than an attack on primitive or prototypic forms of totalitarianism. But he sees the tribalist society as a closed collectivist society which dominates every aspect of the lives of its members. As such it is the ancient enemy of the open society, the antithesis of a liberal society and of societies organized around respect for the individual and the idea of human rights.⁴⁰ Popper develops his account of tribalism in the context of an attack on Plato, but his critique is important also for modern political theory and most applicable in multi-ethnic societies like Nigeria. It is also relevant to the more philosophical issue between liberals and communitarians that is, between those who are committed to exactly the values that Popper's celebrated in his idea of the open society and those who yearn nostalgically for forms of community and belonging that pull us back from the abyss of total choice and of a largely abstract concept of human relationships.⁴¹ The point here is to point out those aspects of Popper's criticism of tribalism that will help in reinforcing

34. Popper, Karl. "Un-ended Quest, p. 72.

35. Popper, Karl. "Un-ended Quest, p. 89.

36. Popper, Karl. "Un-ended Quest, p. 88.

37. Popper, Karl. "Un-ended Quest, p. 89.

38. Corvi, Roberta. *An Introduction to the Thought of Karl Popper* .p.164

39. Waldron, Jeremy. "Tribalism and the Myth of the Framework: Some Popperian thoughts on the politics of cultural recognition". In *Karl Popper: Critical appraisals* ed. Philopcatton & Graham MacDonald (London, Routledge, 2004)20

40. Waldron, Jeremy. "Tribalism and the Myth of the Framework: Some thoughts on the politics of cultural recognition". In *Karl Popper: Critical appraisals* ed. Philopcatton & Graham MacDonald (London, Routledge, 2004)203.

41. Waldron, Jeremy p. . "Tribalism and the Myth of the Framework: Some Popperian thoughts on the politics of cultural recognition"p.204.

some misgivings we have about the rise of ethnicity in the pluralistic Nigerian society.

Karl Popper associated tribalism with collectivism with an “emphasis on the supreme importance of the tribe without which the individual is nothing at all”¹⁹. A tribalist form of society involves the subordination of the individual, and collective enterprises. But what Popper associates particularly with tribalism is not merely the subordination of individual interests to those of the group, but also the attitude taken by members of a society to the customs that constitutes their tribal way of life. Popper sees the open society as a transition from such closed or tribal society and sees the open society as transition which is one of the deepest revolutions through which mankind has passed”²⁰.

However, he acknowledged that there are still enemies of this transition who still wish to return to that era of unreflective normativity. This is because, in the original tribal milieu, people are presumably in a situation where the mores and customs constitutive of their way of life simply govern their actions in a way that is beyond any question or reflection.⁴² Describing the ancient Greek-Roman society, Popper noted:

The early Greek tribal society resembles in many respects that of peoples like the Polynesians, the Moaris for instance, small bands of warriors, usually living in fortified settlements ruled by tribal chiefs or kings or by aristocratic families, were waging war against one another on sea as well as on land. There were, of course, many differences between the Greek and the Polynesians ways of life, for there is, admittedly, no uniformity in tribalism. ... It seems to me, however, that there are some characteristics that can be found in most, if not all, of these tribal society. I mean their magical or irrational attitude towards the customs of social life and the corresponding rigidity of these customs.⁴³

He sees tribalism as an attitude which represent a deliberate attempt to turn one's back on the gains of the modern open society to naturalistic or magical attitude to social norms in order to recover the lost sense of tribal unity and stability. He sees this as a nostalgic enterprise that is unfashionable in today's world. According to him tribalism can only flourish in a mono-ethnic society that is closed from cultural contacts. As such, the activation of tribalistic sentiments in the pluralistic society will result to crisis and resentment. He exemplified this by referring to the crisis of ancient pluralism, suggesting that the rise of Christianity was in part;

a protest against Jewish tribalism, against its rigid and empty tribal taboos and against its tribal exclusiveness which expressed itself, for example, in the doctrine of the chosen people i.e. In an interpretative of the deity as a tribal god. Such an emphasis upon tribal laws and tribal unity appears to be characteristic not so much of a primitive tribal society as of a desperate attempt to restore and arrest the old forms of tribal life and in the case of Jewry, it seems to have originated as a reaction to the impact of the Babylonian conquest on Jewish tribal life.⁴⁴

43. Waldron, Jeremy. “Tribalism and the Myth of the Framework; Some Popperian thoughts on the politics of cultural recognition”p. 211.

44. Popper, Karl. *The Open society and its enemies. Vol.1. The spell of Plato.*p.17

He noted that when tribal affiliation or sentiments are employed as the subject of a campaign of restoration of lost ethnic identity, it is too late to recapture the sense of implicit necessity associated with their original social existence. The modern society has no room for evolving an ideology of nationalism that sourced its operation from ethnic affiliation. In the words of Popper:

With Alexander's empire, genuine tribal nationalism disappears for ever from political practice, and for a long time from political theory. From Alexander onward, all the civilized states of Europe and Asia were empires, embracing populations of infinitely mixed origin. European civilisation and all the political units belonging to it have remained international or more precisely, inter-tribal ever since⁴⁵

The implication of this statement is that tribalism reflects the unreflective normativity, mysticism and irrationality capable of breeding mediocrity in the open society which is termed globalised. Corroborating, Isaiah Berlin noted that tribalism is hinged on culturalism where one's culture is promoted unreflectively and uncritically simply because it is ours. In his book “*Against the current: Essays in the History of ideas*” published in 1981, Berlin observed.

One of the most compelling reasons, ... for holding a particular belief, pursuing a particular policy, serving a particular end, living a particular life, is that these ends, beliefs, policies, lives are ours. This is tantamount to saying that these rules or doctrines or principles should be followed not because they ... are good and right in themselves... but because these values are those of my group.⁴⁶

This attitude which underpins the operational principle of the tribalist is antithetical to national cohesion in a nation that has plural ethnic groups each holding on to his or her tribal interest. It will be difficult to achieve national integration in that context.

As such, no one today but a fool (in which category Popper placed Woodrow Wilson) could think that ethnic nationality could possibly be the basis for a practicable principle of political self-determinations in the globalised society. So, the idea of national solidarity continues to entrance us. Popper sees romantic myth of tribal collectivism as an answer to “tribal instincts, to passion and to prejudice, and to our nostalgic desire to be relieved from the strain of individual responsibility which it attempts to replace by a collective or group responsibility.”⁴⁷ Accordingly, the strongest demand that is made in modern identity politics is that we should respect the distinctive dignity of the cultural or ethnic background that each individual has or claims as its own. But the feeling of seeing the interest of one's own tribe or ethnic group above other ethnic group in multi-ethnic states of today will militate against national integration as currently being experienced in Nigeria.

45. Popper, “*The Open Society and its Enemies*, Vol. II, 50.

46. Berlin, Isaiah. *Against the current: Essays in the History of Ideas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981) p.342.

47. Popper, Karl “*The Open Society and its Enemies*, Vol. II, 49.

KARL POPPER'S THOUGHTS ON TRIBALISM AND THE CHALLENGE OF NATIONAL INTEGRATION IN NIGRIA

It is pertinent to note that in his conceptualisation of tribalism, Popper sees tribalism as an enterprise of those who seek, nostalgically, to lead us back to the lost down of tribal solidarity and unreflective normativity.⁴⁸ For him, tribalism is simply a longing for homogenous community by people who no longer live in the circumstances in which such feeling flourished. Accordingly, the strongest demand that is made in modern identity politics is that we should respect the distinctive dignity of the cultural or ethnic groups that now forms the Open Society with greater openness to appreciate our new found unity in diversity. This involves the supreme effort by each ethnic group towards integration than isolation and avoidance of tribal self-determination that leads to alienation in increasingly globalized.

In his understanding of the modern multi-cultural society as an open society, Popper has many years ago predicted globalisation as an inevitable feature of our post-modernist nation-states. Hence, the forging of national identity is more desirable than the sustenance of the fiction of ethnicity because according to Owolabi,

The nation-state is the only form of legal and legitimate identity and also because it is the most effective structure that can ensure the desired development⁴⁹

So, tribalism according to Popper has vanished irretrievably with the emergence of the nation-states. As such, tribalism becomes an attitude of holding or longing for what is no longer in existence. Tribalism is not an answer to any form of cultural identity politics or politics of recognition in today's world which is termed globalised. In this age: "globalisation trend is a basis for communal values because man cannot negotiate his security, happiness and well-being in an isolated manner"⁵⁰. As such, instead of tribalism, we are to strive for a nation-state that gives adequate recognition to ethnic groups and which also incorporates the principle of justice in organising the diverse groups within the different nation-states that formed the open society like Nigeria.

Ethnicity as social injustice and the triumph of mediocrity

We have identified earlier in this work that social injustice is one of the potent force behind the flourishing of tribalism especially among minorities and marginalised ethnic groups. But my findings show that tribalism is both the product and producer of social injustice in Nigeria. That is to say that in as much as, social injustice breeds tribalism, tribalism can be a form of social injustice were meritocracy as sacrifice for mediocrity. According to Chinua Achebe "the major objection to the practice of tribalism is that it exposes the citizen to unfair treatment and social injustice"⁵¹. He further contend that the 'less advertised but no less damaging, to social morality is the advantage which tribalism may confer on mediocrity.⁵²

48. Popper, Karl. *The Open Society and its Enemies* Vol.1., p.

49. Owolabi, K.A. *Fictional Tribes and Tribal Fictions: Ethnicity, Ethnocentrism and the Problem of the other in Africa*. (Ibadan: John Archer, 2003) 6.

50. Oyeshile, Olatunji. *Reconciling the self with the other: An existentialist perspective on the management of conflicts in Africa* (Ibadan: Hope Publication 2005.) 20

51. Achebe, Chinua. *The Trouble with Nigeria*.p.19

52. Achebe, Chinua. *The Trouble with Nigeria*.p.19

The one whose competence and merit is not appreciated on the basis of tribalism is bound to be embittered and the society is usually at the receiving end. Corroborating, Achebe noted that:

The greatest sufferer is the nation itself which has to contain the legitimate grievance of a wronged citizen; accommodate the incompetence of a favoured citizen and more important and of greater scope, endure a general decline of morale and subversion of efficiency caused by an erratic system of performance and reward.⁵³

This perfectly captures the current happenings in the Nigerian socio-political environment where merit has been sacrificed for tribal, ethnic, regional and often religious sentiments. Hence, mediocrity is in its triumphalist stage where the most celebrated credentials for employment, appointment and any other consideration is where one comes from and the ethnic group one belongs as well as one's religious affiliation. As such, it is difficult at this point in our history to point at any position in Nigeria where the most qualified person has occupied. In the words of Achebe, Nigeria as result of tribalism continues to parade with his third and fourth eleven to play for her. Consequently “We have always failed and will always fail to make it to the world league until that is, we put merit back on the national agenda”⁵⁴.

The imperative of national integration in a pluralistic Nigerian society.

Nigeria is not a homogenous or mono-cultural society. It is a society which in Popperian description can be termed “an open society” because of its diverse and pluralistic character. As such, while ethnic consciousness cannot be completely discarded, it has to be recognised rightly as part of the ideological rationalization that reinforces and in turn reflects the modern character of nation-states. Since, it is difficult to reverse our ethnic alignments and configurations; we must try as much as possible to engender a sense of community based on the principle of common good and collective survival.⁵⁵ According to Oladipo

What is required for the renewal of hope in Nigeria as a viable modern state is the establishment of an appropriate political framework for mutual cooperation among the various nationalities in the country.⁵⁶

Apart from this, there is the need to restructure our social institutions in such a way that they will be an effective vanguard in the promotion of civic values of tolerance, dialogue, understanding, compassion, justice and equity.⁵⁷ The eradication of injustice and marginalization of some groups will be imperative for the attainment of national integration. In fact

The legitimacy, survival and integration of a nation-state depends on how far the state as a legal institutions can perform its primary role of distributing benefits and burdens among groups justifiably without any group feeling justifiably aggrieved.⁵⁸

It is only in the environment of justice, equity and mutual respect that our quest for national integration will come to fruition.

53. Achebe, Chinua. *The Trouble with Nigeria*.p.19

54. Achebe, Chinua. *The Trouble with Nigeria*.p.20

55. Oyeshile, Olatunji. *Reconciling the self with the other: An existentialist perspective on the management of conflicts in Africa* .p. 19

56. Oladipo, O. “Values and National Rebirth” in *Recall: A Chronicle of Nigerian Events*. No. 1 (Jan, 2000), p.4.

57. Oladipo, O. “Values and National Rebirth”.p. 4

58. Owolabi, K.A. *Fictional Tribes and Tribal Fictions: Ethnicity, Ethnocentrism and the Problem of the other in Africa*. P.22.

CONCLUSION

Today more than ever there is every need to interrogate the deliberate efforts of Nigerians to build a united and strong Nation. So far, it appears that more energy is being dissipated by different composite unit of the federation in fueling the embers of disunity and mutual suspicion the renewed efforts to promote ethnic chauvinism , regional interest and religious bigotry. We have in this paper reviewed the situation and highlighted the dangers it poses in the quest for national integration particularly now that regional consciousness and self-determination which is being reinforced as the result worsening security situation in the country and the seeming nonchalance of the central government. We deployed Karl Popper's thoughts on tribalism as a theoretical frame for the critical interrogation of the threat of tribalism or ethnicity which he perceived as an enterprise of those who are still living in the past. For him, the open society which best describes our present experience abhors such tendencies. The modern nation-states which Nigeria is one cannot move towards national integration with tribalism or ethnicity. Nigeria as a country with diverse socio-cultural groups and pluralistic creeds need unity in diversity. The actualization of Nigeria's potentials as a nation lies not in tribalistic isolations but in its inter-tribal co-operation. The contemporary society with its globalisation process is dismantling barriers and linking peoples. There is an increased political configuration, massive economic exchanges including cross-border trade in goods and services, capital flows and rapid utilization of electronic communications as well as cultural influences. Therefore, being in this age means utilizing the objective forces that can indeed benefit humanity and increase humanity's solidarity. Ethnicity breeds injustice, mediocrity and above all, hampers national integration.