

A Philosophical Analysis of Intergroup Relations in Nigeria and the Question of Paul Feyerabend's Cultural Relativism and Tolerance

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Abstract

Intergroup relations remain a major challenge in today's diverse and globalised societies, especially in nations like Nigeria that comprise of numerous groups ranging from ethnic, religious, cultural, political, social etc. Several approaches and perspectives have been proposed to promote smooth intergroup relations in Nigeria: Anthropologists and philosophers have all offered various divergent and conflicting explanations and conceptions; however, the problem remains unsolved. This paper attempts to discuss these divergent and seemingly conflicting views in the light of Feyerabend's cultural relativism and tolerance and its implications for intergroup relations in Nigeria. To achieve this goal, the paper first discusses Paul Feyerabend's cultural relativism, which focuses on the respect and consideration for other people's worldviews, cultures and morals, and then his notion of tolerance. Feyerabend believes that what is right for one cultural group may not be right for another. This study shows that different groups have different worldviews and belief systems that should not be neglected for any reason. From the exposition, our conclusion in this paper is that, Feyerabend's cultural relativism and tolerance has positive implications for the Nigerian society because the ideas are capable of fostering smooth inter-group relations among the Nigerian peoples.

Key Words: Intergroup Relations, Nigeria, Paul Feyerabend, Cultural Relativism and Tolerance.

Introduction

History has recorded numerous instances of conflict, due to one tribe, culture, religion, individual, ideology, school of thought, etc. assuming or placing itself above others. This has caused great problems to man and the society as a whole, because the more an individual, society, culture, theory, school of thought, ideology, etc. tries to promote itself or its self-interest over the other, the more conflicts, clashes and crises the society has. The problem of the relations between people, cultures and societies is as old as human existence. There are certain individual, cultural, moral and societal differences that have set the society, especially our Nigerian state on fire. These have also fueled the constant raging of disagreements and heated arguments among different cultural and social groups. Conflicts frustrate the growth and development of the Nigerian society in particular and other societies in general. To this end, this study proposes Feyerabend's cultural relativism and tolerance as a panacea for the recurring ethnic, religious, ethnic, religious, cultural, political, social conflicts among Nigerian peoples.

Feyerabend's form of relativism is not a philosophical doctrine to be judged as true or false, but a method for dealing with individual, moral, and cultural differences, as well as any form of difference whether religious, personal, political, social, ideological, theoretical, etc. It is a form of relativism that demands intellectual, social, moral, cultural and political tolerance. It calls for the rejection or denunciation of dogmatism and the overemphasis of one culture or aspect of culture over the other(s). It also calls for tolerance and respect for the views, values, ideologies, norms and cultures of others¹. His relativism states that what is right for one culture may not be right for another culture, and what is right for one person may not be right for another. For example, what is right for me may not be right for you, and what is right for you may not be right for me. Similarly, what is right for your culture may not be right for my own culture, and vice versa. It is a form of relativism that leaves room for tolerance of people's practices, and it shares the same ideology with other forms of relativism such as epistemic relativism, moral relativism, scientific relativism, and so on². The above idea can be traced back to Feyerabend's anarchistic philosophy of science where he seeks to criticize and reject any theory that serves as an ideal theory for science,

and also the use of any particular theory to judge other scientific theories. It is his rejection of scientific absolutism that he transferred to his moral and ethical framework. Feyerabend accepts certain relativistic elements: Dependence, since he saw judgments as relative to traditions; Plurality, since there is more than one tradition; Symmetry as non- neutrality, since there is no neutral way of evaluating traditions³

Feyerabend's form of relativism suggests that all traditions and cultures should be treated equally, and that democratic societies should give equal rights and equal opportunities to all traditions. This form of relativism also holds that laws, morals, religious beliefs, customs and values are valid in their respective and limited domains. As such, we must pay attention to and respect the wishes, opinions, habits and suggestions of others who are different from us. Feyerabend argues that “humanitarian considerations” and “equal rights” are the touchstone of the progress of human societies. Everyone should have the right to live as he or she sees fit because a free society requires free treatment of all traditions, regardless of religion, colour, background, race, or advantages⁴.

Thus, this study assesses Paul Feyerabend's cultural relativism and tolerance. The researchers are motivated by the quest and interest in ethical discussions, especially as discussed through the lens of Paul Feyerabend. The researchers are also motivated to discuss relativism and tolerance in Nigeria, and how it can go a long way in resolving ethnic, religious, ethnic, religious, cultural, political, social conflicts among Nigerians.

An Overview of Feyerabend's Cultural Relativism and Tolerance

The main aim of this section is to provide a general overview of Feyerabend's relativism and tolerance. As it were, Feyerabend argues that there is no single, objective method for gaining knowledge, and that different cultures and historical periods have developed their own unique methods for understanding the world. He argues that all these methods are equally valid and that the idea of a single, universal scientific method is a myth. This can be traced back to Feyerabend's anarchist philosophy where he argues that anarchism is the best method or medicine for science. Thus, for us to live in freedom, to live a full and rewarding life,

and to attempt to discover the secrets of nature, requires the rejection or denunciation of universal standards, and any form of rigid or dogmatic tradition⁵. In short, the insistence on static or unchanging rules, methods, etc. hinders development and progress. This is because the idea of a fixed method or a fixed theory of rationality is based on too naïve a view of man and his social environment. He argues that there is no single rule (culture, tradition, religion, etc) that remains valid in all circumstances, and no single authority that can always be appealed to. For him, the belief in a single set of standards that has always led to success and will always lead to success is nothing but a chimera⁶. Any society that insists on a set of well-defined and restrictive rules, so that being human becomes synonymous with obeying these rules forces the dissenter into a no-man's-land where there are no rules at all, and also strips him of his reason and his humanity. When we remove principles and allow the possibility of many different ways of living, problems, crises, absurdities, etc. disappear like a bad dream.

Speaking of ideal knowledge, Feyerabend writes that;

Ideal knowledge is not a series of self-consistent theories that converges towards an ideal view, nor is it a gradual process or approach to the truth. It is an ever increasing ocean of mutually incompatible and incommensurable alternatives, each single theory, each fairy-tale, each tale, each myth that is part of the collection forcing the others into greater articulation and all of them contributing, via this process of competition, to the development of our consciousness⁸.

In this account according to Feyerabend, no view can ever be excluded from the scheme of things. He is against the chauvinism or dominance of science over all traditions; the view that “what is compatible with science should live, and what is not compatible with science should die⁹.” Even knowledge for him, comes from a multiplicity of views rather than from the determined application of a preferred ideology. He also believes that there is no single concept of knowledge, since a variety of words are used to express what we now consider to be different forms of knowledge, or

as different ways of acquiring knowledge¹⁰. In his view, the world is not given to us directly, as such, we have to grasp it through the medium of traditions, and science is not the only tradition, except for people who have got used to its presence, its benefits and its disadvantages. Even the idea that scientific knowledge is somehow peculiarly positive and free from disagreement is nothing but a chimera.

Feyerabend also distinguished between philosophical relativism and political relativism. While political relativism affirms that “all traditions have equal rights, and that the mere fact that some people have arranged their lives in accordance with a certain tradition suffices to provide this tradition with all the basic rights of the society in which it occurs¹².” Philosophical relativism on the other hand assumes that all traditions, theories, ideas, cultures, etc are equally true or equally false. Feyerabend states that he is on way defending this kind of doctrine¹³. This view has been supported by several scholars who have studied Feyerabend's relativism, most notably Martin Kusch, who argues in his work “Relativism in Feyerabend's Later Writings” that Feyerabend accepts political relativism (the view that all traditions, cultures, religions, ideas, etc have equal rights) rather than philosophical relativism (the view that ideas, theories, etc are equally true or equally false). Still pushing the idea of relativism forward, Feyerabend argues that every project, theory, idea, etc must to be judged on its own merits, and by standards appropriate to the processes with which it deals. In his view, the search for a universal, stable and unchanging method as the measure of adequacy and even the idea of a universal and stable rationality, is unrealistic and misguided¹⁴.

When this view is applied to traditions, cultures, religions, etc., it means that there is no such thing as a universal idea, religion, culture, tradition, etc.; and that the pursuit or search for a universal, stable and unchanging culture, tradition, ideology, religion, etc. to serve as a standard for others is misguided and unrealistic. Each culture, tradition, religion, etc. must be judged through its own lens. This is contained in his idea that science must be done without recourse to on any well- defined or stable scientific method¹⁵. There is no single a-historical method or tradition. Even science is not the only tradition. It is regarded as the best tradition mainly because the game or show has been rigged in its favour. Science succeeds

not because it is better than myths, religions or other traditions; it succeeds simply because scientists and science have suppressed the bearers of other traditions. For him, the other theories, ideologies, traditions, etc. which are not scientific can become powerful rivals and even expose the flaws of science if given a fair chance to compete; and it is the task of a free society, and its institutions to give them such a fair chance¹⁶. Feyerabend illustrates this fact by arguing that there is not a single scientific idea that has not been stolen from somewhere else.

With regard to freedom, Feyerabend believes that all people, even puny, despicable people, are human and are created in God's image, and this alone is enough reason to treat them with respect. Therefore, he believes that every human being should be given the freedom to lead the kind of life he or she wants. Even those who wish to fulfill themselves by killing their fellows, and who feel fully alive when in mortal danger, should be allowed to form a sub-society of their own, where human targets are selected for the hunt, and are hunted down mercilessly, either by an individual or by a group. Those who wish to live a dangerous life or taste human blood within the boundaries of their sub-society will not be permitted or allowed to force others who do not wish to go their way¹⁸. This is because Feyerabend believes that people have different tastes, and so those who prefer to wallow in blood should be allowed to do so, without being given the power to make “heroes” of the rest of the society. In his view, a world in which everyone can live freely and happily is a better and more mature world¹⁹.

He also opposed the imposition of Western culture, ideals and mentality on other cultures. For him, this culture imposes a liberal-rational democracy which cannot contain a black culture or a Jewish culture in the full sense of the word; it can only contain these cultures as secondary²⁰. For him, there is more to be learned from non-Western traditions both in terms of efficiency and in humanity, and that we have much to gain by allowing these traditions to dwell freely in our midst rather than forcing or mutilating them through rationalist tendencies. For Feyerabend, this will promote personal freedom by allowing people to choose between different ways of life. For him, man should be able to do more than morally imitate his environment. He should be able to

evaluate them, their weaknesses and their strengths, and to choose for himself as a conscious member of his tradition; and it is the availability of different traditions that gives him such consciousness, which in turn gives him intellectual freedom²¹. It follows from this account that Feyerabend prefers pluralism to monism, since the availability of different traditions gives man a degree of consciousness and freedom, rather than merely imitating his environment and surroundings.

Feyerabend also discussed the subject of cultural diversity, which he believed should be celebrated and respected, and that there was no objective standard by which one culture could be judged superior to another. In the preface to "*Science in a Free Society*", Feyerabend began by saying that reason is a tradition, just like other traditions. As such it simply is. In the same way, traditions are neither good nor bad, they simply are. They only become good or bad (rational/irrational, pious/impious, advanced/primitive, humanitarian/vicious, etc.) when seen from the point of view of other traditions²². Feyerabend paints a picture of a free society, a society in which all traditions are given equal rights and equal access to the positions of power. In his view, such traditions do not have such rights not because of their importance (monetary value) to outsiders but because they give meaning to the lives of the participants. Therefore, he argues that giving equal rights to all traditions is not only good, but the most useful thing to do²³.

In his work he presented the following relativistic arguments in his works:

- i. Traditions are neither good nor bad, they simply are...rationality is not an arbiter of traditions, it is itself a tradition or an aspect of a tradition. It is therefore neither good nor bad, it simply is.
- ii. A tradition assumes desirable or undesirable properties only when compared with some traditions, that is, only when viewed by participants who see the world in terms of its own values.
- iii. i and ii imply a relativism, precisely the kind that seem to have been defended by Protagoras." For Feyerabend, Protagorean relativism is reasonable because it pays attention to the pluralism of traditions and values, and it is civilized, for it does not assume that one's own village and the strange customs it contains are the navel of the

- world.
- iv. A free society is a society in which all traditions are given equal rights, equal access to education and other positions of power²⁴.
 - v. A free society will not be imposed but will emerge only when people engaging in an open exchange introduce protective structures of the kind alluded to.
 - vi. The debates settling the structure of a free society are open debates not guided debates.
 - vii. A free society insists on the separation of science and society²⁵.

In this sense, he argues that no tradition is sacrosanct. Nor is science sacrosanct. The mere fact that it exists, is admired and produces results is not enough to make it a measure of excellence. In describing the degree of dominance found in science, Feyerabend notes that science now occupies the same position as the autocratic medieval church or philosophy that it once fought or criticized. Science which now holds the belief that some claims are objective and independent of tradition is a secularized form of the belief in the power of the word of God²⁶.

Feyerabend sees this as a major problem because science is not seen as a tradition or a practice among others which may be imperfect, fallible or subject to change but as an enduring measure of excellence, and the so-called excellence of science is assumed and not argued for. He argues that in a free society, there is room for many different and strange beliefs, doctrines, traditions, etc, but the assumption of the superiority of science has gone beyond science and has become an article of faith for everyone²⁷. Science dominates every aspect of our lives (medicine, prison reform, human relations, etc). Even in our schools, almost all scientific subjects are made compulsory, and must be learnt. "We accept scientific laws and facts without any doubt, teach them in schools, and make them the basis of important political decisions without even testing or questioning them²⁸."

According to Feyerabend, traditions that give substance to the lives of people must be given equal rights and equal access to key positions in the society regardless of what other traditions think about them²⁹. In this sense, he sees relativism as the realization that one's own most cherished

point of view may turn out to be only one of many ways of organizing life, important to those who have been brought up in that tradition, but totally uninteresting and perhaps even a hindrance to others. He also points out that “tolerance does not mean accepting falsehood alongside truth; it means humane treatment of those who are unfortunately caught up in falsehood. He counters the position that relativism means giving equal rights to truth and falsehood, reason and madness, virtue and wickedness, etc³⁰.

Implications of Feyerabend's Cultural Relativism and Tolerance for Intergroup Relations in Nigeria

Intergroup conflict in Nigeria is a complex and multifaceted problem that has been going on for decades. The country has over 250 ethnic groups, each with its own culture, language, and identity. The most prominent intergroup conflicts in Nigeria have been between the Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo ethnic groups. However, there have also been conflicts between other ethnic groups. One of the root causes of intergroup conflict in Nigeria is the struggle for political power and control over resources. This has led to ethnic groups feeling marginalized and excluded from political and economic decision-making processes. Other factors that have contributed to intergroup conflict in Nigeria include religious differences, competition for land, and the legacy of colonialism.

Intergroup conflicts in Nigeria have led to the loss of thousands of lives and the displacement of millions of people. Some of the most violent intergroup conflicts in Nigeria include the Biafran War, the Jos Crisis, and the Niger Delta Conflict. Efforts to address intergroup conflict in Nigeria have included constitutional reform, interfaith dialogue and conflict resolution mechanisms. The government has also established the National Peace Committee to promote peace and reconciliation. However, despite these efforts, conflicts continue to occur in Nigeria, highlighting the need for more sustained and comprehensive approaches to address the root causes of the conflict.

A proper study of Feyerabend's cultural relativism and tolerance shows that it has major implications for intergroup relations and interactions in

Nigeria, as well as other nations. This section therefore examines how Feyerabend's relativism can be applied to conflict resolution especially in multi-religious, multi-cultural and multi-ethnic nations like Nigeria and others. Feyerabend's cultural relativism and tolerance refer to the idea that different cultures have different values, beliefs, and practices, and that these differences should be respected and tolerated. Cultural relativism asserts that there is no universal standard for assessing the value or worth of a culture, and that each culture should be evaluated on its own terms. Tolerance, on the other hand, suggests that individuals should be accepting of and open to other cultures, and should avoid imposing their own values and beliefs on others. This is in line with Feyerabend's idea "that people have different tastes, and so those who prefer to wallow in blood should be allowed to do so, without giving them the power to make "heroes" of the rest of the society. In his view, a world in which everyone can live freely and happily is a better and more mature world³¹."

Feyerabend argued that cultural relativism and tolerance were essential for promoting intergroup understanding and harmony. He believed that intolerance and ethnocentrism were major sources of conflict between different groups and that promoting tolerance and cultural relativism could help to reduce these conflicts. He believed that cultures, traditions, religions, worldviews, etc. other than one's own must be tolerated. This is because traditions do not have well-defined boundaries, and also contain ambiguities and methods of change that enable their members to think and act as if there were no boundaries. This means that a nation like Nigeria poses some challenges to diversity and group cohesion. The ugly situation is such that different ethnic groups compromise on the basis of Nigeria's ethnic, religious and linguistic plurality. Within an organization, it is common to have or see a divided workforce divided along ethnic (tribal), religious, linguistic, gender, socio-educational and political lines. Those from outside an ethnic group are often treated with contempt and even discriminated against, while some are deliberately denied certain work benefits to which they are entitled on these grounds. Members of the leading or dominant folk are bound to enjoy much more favouritism and job satisfaction than those outside the given folk, such as easy (due/regular) promotions, job satisfaction, and job enrichment, job

(re) design, on-the-job training, and involvement in workplace politics, among others. There tends to be more cordial relations, interaction and effective communication between members of the same ethnic group. And any nation characterize by diverse ethnic, religious or social groups can have a relationship in which these groups recognize, understand and respect each other's diversity. People from different and diverse backgrounds can help each other see possibilities that they never thought were there because of the limitations or cultural prohibitions imposed by their own traditions, cultures, religions, groups, etc.

Feyerabend asserts that all traditions, people, cultures, religions, etc must be treated equally, and must be given equal access to education, and to the positions of power. This has implications for Nigeria, as it leads to the realization that no culture or tradition has it all, and that no culture or tradition is superior to another. It also promotes the acceptance, respect and understanding of religions, traditions or cultures that are alien to one's own, and that no culture, religion or tradition should seek to impose its beliefs on another. Each group is to tolerate another group, even if their beliefs and practices are in stark contrast to its own; and even if their beliefs, practices, religions, cultures, traditions, etc. turn out to be useless or meaningless to the rest of the society. This has a way of removing and eliminating all forms of extremism and centrism. Again, awareness of the merely relative validity of one's own cultural norms makes one less likely to fall into arrogant ethnocentrism and less inclined to make moral judgments about the beliefs and practices of religions, cultures, traditions and groups.

Conclusion

This paper has successfully assessed the efficacy and strength of Feyerabend's cultural relativism and tolerance and explains how it could be used to achieve smooth intergroup relations in Nigeria and even beyond. Haven observed the widespread crises and controversies that arise as a result of one culture, tradition, religion, etc trying to impose itself or its beliefs and practices on others, Paul Feyerabend distinguished himself greatly by developing a philosophy of relativism and tolerance that has implications for a smooth and harmonious interaction and coexistence among diverse groups. This is a consequence of his

anarchistic philosophy of science; the view that there is no universal method for doing or conducting scientific research. It is this argument that he later transferred to an analysis of cultures and traditions, and thus to his argument for tolerance of other views, ideologies, religions, cultures, opinions, theories, traditions, individuals, etc. that are different from, and even contradictory to, our own. Through this philosophy, Paul Feyerabend's philosophy becomes an important model for achieving peaceful, smooth and harmonious coexistence among individuals and groups in Nigeria and beyond.

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