

Disordered Society: Philosophy and Economic Injustice in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT: Nigeria is one of the most diverse nations of the world with approximately 250 language groups and many religious sects mutually opposed to one another. The abuse of this diversity (in forms of ethnic and religious nationalisms) has created massive disorder in political, social, moral and economic spheres to name just a few. Ethnic and religious nationalisms are therefore shown to be at the crust of Nigeria's problems rather than corruption and bad leadership. The latter two are shown to be various manifestations of the main problems identified. The proposed Sovereign National Dialogue is a vital effort to reconcile the widening differences and if one likes, produce order in a greatly disordered Nigerian society. In this paper, we single out economic injustice as one of the pivots of this disorder and look for ways philosophy can address it through the tool of intercultural dialogue. The paper recognizes the power of dialogue as a tool for reconciliation, for addressing societal imbalances and for restoring order in a disordered setting. Our evaluations are rather pessimistic for the conditions of genuine dialogue are absent and the paper envisages a failure of the proposed national dialogue in Nigeria.

Introduction: Disorder in Nigeria

What do we mean by disorder? The dictionary meaning would have it as lack or absence of order, the state of being disarranged or disordered, a disregard or neglect of orderliness¹. Disorder could also mean a state of confusion, crisis and intractability in any system whether political, social, moral or economic as is our concern in this work.

Economic injustice in Nigeria is perpetrated against individuals, groups, regions and ethnic nationalities which do not hold political power. Political power in Nigeria is a means of control and distribution of the

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¹ Stephenson Smith *et al.*, ed. (Typhoon International), *The New International Webster's Comprehensive Dictionary of the English Language*. Florida: Trident Press, 2004, p. 367.

so-called national cake. Transparency International² and other watchdogs have penned down the name of Nigeria as one of the most corrupt countries in the world. The national wealth has continued to be looted by successive political actors who share same according to ethnic and religious loyalty lines.

This corrupt state of affairs has made it difficult for there to be justice in allocation of federal resources in Nigeria. The federal character also is in itself unjust because more political allocations are given to regions who contribute less to the National wealth under the guise of population. According to Ladipo Adamolekun *et al.*, the “federal character” principle, which has been enshrined in Nigeria’s Constitution since 1979, seeks to ensure that appointments to public service institutions fairly reflect the linguistic, ethnic, religious, and geographic diversity of the country.³ The implementation of this has been to the favour of the regions which control political power in Nigeria since independence. And this infringes on Aristotle’s tenets of distributive justice and Rawls’ maxim of justice as fairness.

On the sharing of revenues in Nigeria, this is done through percentage allocations to the three tiers of government with the federal government receiving the lion share. Ikeji writes that Welfare economics and political theory are the two strands of theory which significantly guide revenue allocation and that the main theme of the economic argument is the bridging of inequality gap. This gap exists because of unequal endowment of natural resources which result in an imbalance in the physical development of the communities.⁴ The problem that arises here is that the big federal allocation is spent almost entirely on the regions that control political power at the federal level but contribute less in the generation of the national wealth.

It is, therefore, clear that the conditions of economic injustice are present in Nigeria namely: uneven development, inequality, massive poverty, uneven distribution of resources and opportunities, marginalization, insecurity, discrimination, ethnicity, religious bigotry, unemployment, divide between the rich and the poor, etc. The modes of perpetrating economic injustice in Nigeria include: distribution of national resources, allocation of opportunity, political appointments, employment discrimination, provision of basic amenities to name a few. And these are carried out at

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² USAID Report. Nigeria Economic Performance Assessment. Nathan Associates Inc. February, 2009, p. 13.

³ Ladipo Adamolekun, John Erero and Basil Oshionebo in the *Journal of Federalism*, 1991, 21 (4): 75-88.

⁴ Chibueze Ikeji, “Politics of Revenue Allocation in Nigeria: A Reconsideration of some Contending Issues”, *Sacha Journal of Policy and Strategic Studies*, Volume 1, Number 1 (2011), 125: pp. 121-136.

two main levels namely; group and ethnic/religious levels. At the group level are the youth, women, wage earners, poverty class. However, the focus of our work is at ethnic/religious level where benefits and punishment are allocated along ethnic and religious lines since colonial times. This was further strengthened in the aftermath of the bloody Civil War. As Kukah observes, “The history of the relation between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria is closely tied to the history of the Nigerian state. The tensions generated by the colonial state laid the foundations for most of the tensions that still persist today”⁵. These tensions manifest principally as ethnic and religious divide. In this essay, we shall articulate the thesis of economic injustice in Nigeria, examine philosophy’s ability to negotiate this through its tools of ethics/justice and dialogue. Additionally, we shall assess Nigeria’s present circumstances with a view to observing the efficacy of proposed national dialogue in restoring order in the disordered system.

Philosophy and Economic Injustice in Nigeria

Philosophy has innumerable definitions most of which rival each other but all authors agree on one point, i.e., that philosophy evokes the tool of rationality in understudying the problems of life and society. T. H. Harold says that “philosophy is in part the speculative attitude that does not shrink from facing the difficult and unsolved problems of life”.⁶ This is corroborated by Ben Eboh who says that “philosophizing means examining seriously and critically our experiences of the world around us and of our own experiences of life and its problems with a view to increasing the quality of our lives”.⁷ What is suggested here is that philosophy encapsulates the problem solving indices of any society. In other words, to philosophize is to identify a problem and seek its solution. Scholars like Bertrand Russell⁸ adduce that one of the things that makes philosophy different from other areas that seek to solve humanity’s problems is that philosophy does not proffer solutions carelessly and dogmatically as ordinary people or even the sciences do but critically and carefully.

In this way, we understand that the philosopher is the society gadfly. Every society has its own philosophers. And one dares say that in any society where philosophers have shrunk from their natural duty, such is a society in trouble. It is pummeled from every corner by the problems created through men’s ignorance and selfishness. Sometimes, a society

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⁵ Matthew Kukah, p. 1.

⁶ T. H. Harold, *Living issues in Philosophy*. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1970, p. 2.

⁷ O. Ben Eboh, *Philosophy in the Growth of Nigeria*. Onitsha: Veritas Press, 1980, p. 10.

⁸ Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy*. London: Oxford University Press, 7th ed., 1976, p. 1.

may boast of bad philosophers controlling the affairs of men. These set of bad philosophers employ the tool of rationality to create problems for their society in the hood of solutions. Thus every society has its unfair share of good and bad philosophers. Hence for every Socrates there are a thousand Critiases; for every Plato, there are always a thousand Therameneses. However, the positive argument philosophers of many persuasions hold is that the force of good is always stronger than the force of evil, numeric discrepancy notwithstanding.

Therefore, every society has its problems. This varies from one society to another. These peculiar problems inform the type of philosophy evoked to their solution. This is made glaring by Russell when he said: "To understand an age or action, we must understand its philosophy..., the circumstances of men's lives do much to determine their philosophy and their philosophy does much to determine their circumstances".⁹ Here, Russell calls to mind that the circumstances of men's lives in Nigeria should determine the Nigerian national philosophy. Nigeria is a multi-ethnic society with religious divisions. These have become accessory conditions for many problems facing the country. Chinua Achebe¹⁰ prioritizes the leadership problem. Elechi Amadi¹¹ highlights the ethical problem. Many others talk of corruption, favouritism, nepotism, red-tapism, etc., as being more serious. All these are summed up by Eboh who categorizes the problems facing Nigeria into moral, political, technological and economic.¹² Our focus in this work shall be on the economic as we tackle economic injustice in Nigeria using ethics and dialogue as a tools of philosophy.

Philosophy has branches. Metaphysics which investigates being; epistemology which makes knowledge inquiries; logic which among other things investigates the tools of philosophical inquiry, infrastructural philosophy which sticks the nose of philosophy into everything and axiology within which is ethics which makes value inquiries. It is to ethics that we turn first in examining issues concerning economic injustice in Nigeria.

Justice seems like a small word but ethically, it is a big concept. In *The Republic*, Plato presented justice as all parties fulfilling their functions.¹³ In his presentation of Thrasymachus, the latter sees justice as the interest of the stronger party for might is right.¹⁴ The influence of the latter conception reverberates everywhere more as the privation of justice itself.

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⁹ Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy*. London: Oxford University Press, 1974, p. 11.

¹⁰ C. Achebe, *The Trouble with Nigeria*. Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publication, 1983.

¹¹ E. Amadi, *Ethics in Nigeria Culture*. Ibadan: Heinemann Ed. Publishers, 1982.

¹² O. Ben Eboh, p. 10.

¹³ Plato, *The Republic*. London: J. M. Dent and sons. Book 4.

¹⁴ Plato, *The Republic*. Book 1.

In fact, many now consider it as the definition of injustice rather than justice. When people fight to restore justice, they actually fight all forms of domination, repression and oppression which were what Thrasymachus referred to as acts of justice. Such economic oppression with regards to the allocation of resources in Nigeria informs our discussion in this essay.

Aristotle in his *Nichomachean Ethics*¹⁵ conceives justice as one of the moral virtues. He distinguishes between general (which has to do with dispositions of a good citizen) and particular type of justice. He further broke the particular kind into two namely, rectificatory and distributive. Rectificatory is the balance between two parties either as commutative or corrective. While distributive is the allocation of benefits and burdens fairly in the society. It is with recourse to the distributive conception of justice that our concern in this work is made manifest.

In the modern time, scholars like John Rawls have brought in another moral dimension to the conception of justice. He simply conceives justice as fairness which leaves a stain of morality in the wake of this conception. To be just or to do acts of justice, one has to be fair to all concerned and this fairness has to start at the individual level. In his words:

Justice is the first virtue of social institutions, as truth is of systems of thought. A theory however elegant and economical must be rejected or revised if it is untrue; likewise laws and institutions no matter how efficient and well-arranged must be reformed or abolished if they are unjust. Each person possesses an inviolability founded on justice that even the welfare of society as a whole cannot override. For this reason justice denies that the loss of freedom for some is made right by a greater good shared by others. It does not allow that the sacrifices imposed on a few are outweighed by the larger sum of advantages enjoyed by many. Therefore in a just society the liberties of equal citizenship are taken as settled; the rights secured by justice are not subject to political bargaining or to the calculus of social interests. The only thing that permits us to acquiesce in an erroneous theory is the lack of a better one; analogously, an injustice is tolerable only when it is necessary to avoid an even greater injustice. Being first virtues of human activities, truth and justice are uncompromising.¹⁶

We therefore could perceive the moral touch with which Rawls treats the concept of justice. It has to be fair, it has to be uncompromising and it has to cater for the fundamental human rights. Thus, a violation of the provisions of justice is not just a violation of laws of the society but those that are eternal, such as moral and natural laws establishing the uncompromising human rights. This is supposed to be in matters concerning everything in the society including the distribution of economic resources.

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¹⁵ Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, Book 5.

¹⁶ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*. Revised Edition. Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 1990, p. 3.

Neil Ford¹⁷ in his incisive work probes the oil crisis in the oil producing region of Nigeria. His most important finding is that poverty can be linked to high crime rates in the Niger Delta region where there is a big divide between the rich and the poor. The disgruntled masses take to social unrest because the wealth gotten from their territory does not trickle down to them. This is a fitting summary of the economically unjust situation in Nigeria's oil producing regions of the Niger Delta and the East. Nigeria is a former British colony formed in 1914 through the amalgamation of the Northern and the Southern protectorates. It gained political independence in 1960 and has witnessed a chequered history with the military junta ruling for much of its post-independent era. A multi-ethnic society with over 250 language groups, Nigeria is rift with ethnic and religious bigotry. Since independence, tens of ethnic and religious crises rock the country every year, some of which have the tone and scale of pogrom.¹⁸ The civil war of 1967 to 1970 in which more than two million Igbo died remains one of the deadliest civil wars in the history of the world.¹⁹ Mutual bitterness among the ethnic groups has inspired favouritism and marginalization in the distribution of national resources. And control of political power which fall along ethnic division ensures the effective implementation of divisive economic policies.

More than 80 per cent of Nigeria's present income comes through oil. This means that oil is the main source of national earnings and the backbone of the economy. Much of this oil is pumped out of the Niger Delta and the South East areas – the very geese that lay Nigeria's golden eggs. Incidentally, these two areas are marginalized politically and economically. While the Niger Delta areas are made up of units of minority tribal groups – a hot pot of regular opposition to the federal government, the South East is the former Biafran secessionists. It is therefore; easy to see why successive governments in Nigeria met out various forms of economic injustices to them.

Lack of federal government infrastructural projects in the areas under review is a recurrent decimal when compared to the North and West who regularly share political power between them. The 2006 USAID report states that:

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¹⁷ Neil Ford, "Nigeria: Pouring Oil on Delta's Troubled Waters?" *African Business*, Wednesday, August 1, 2007; available at: <http://www.allbusiness.com/government/elections-politics-politics/8909190-1.html>.

¹⁸ Chinua Achebe, *There was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra*, pp. 82-83.

¹⁹ Some of these sources according to Achebe p. 312: produced the statistics as follows: George Childs Kohn, *Dictionary of Wars* nearly 2,000,000; William Eckhardt, *World Military and Social Expeditues*, 1987-88 by Ruth Leger Sivard: 1,000,000 civilians + 1,000,000 military = 2,000,000; Dan Smith, *The State of War and Peace Atlas*: 2,000,000; Jacobs, *The Brutality of Nations*: 3,000,000.

A country needs good physical infrastructure – for transportation, communications, power, and information technology – to strengthen competitiveness and expand productive capacity. Nigeria's infrastructure is of poor quality by any absolute standard, even if it is better than average for Africa, and constrains business; in a recent World Bank Survey, manufacturing firms ranked infrastructure as their most severe business constraint.²⁰

It should be noted that even in the military era, most of the roads, water, housing and other federal projects were in the North and West. General Olusegun Obasanjo was from the West whereas Generals Yakubu Gowon, Muritala Muhammed, Ibrahim Babangida, Sani Abacha were from the North. Under civil rule, Earnest Shonekan and Olusegun Obasanjo were from the West whereas Tafawa Belewa, Shehu Shagari, and Musa Yar' Adua were from the North. With exception of the present president Goodluck Jonathan from Niger Delta area, who is under severe ethnic fire from both the North and West, there has been no one from the East or the Niger Delta to control the seat of Nigeria's government before now. So, much of the federal infrastructural projects both in the military era and in the civil dispensation are mainly in the North and West. In the North for example you could ply hundreds of kilometers of well tarred roads without seeing any other vehicle. Roads that are economically not useful and there are many of such projects in the North. Whereas the economically viable roads like Benin-Onitsha-Owerri-Aba-Port Harcourt popularly known as the Eastern by-pass was a dearth trap till recently. The Onitsha-Enugu-Abakaliki-Ogoja-Ikom-Calabar road has remained dilapidated since the 1970s. The second Niger Bridge, a project that became urgent since the 1970's is yet to be executed. These are economically very important roads. The railway system in the East was allowed to die since after the civil war.

Indeed, sustained economic injustice in Nigeria has aggravated the contrast between the poor and the rich in Nigeria. Whereas the poor keeps getting poorer, the wealthy class continues to get richer. There is now in Nigeria, separate areas of residence for the rich and the poor. Basic amenities are available where the rich stay while they are almost absent where the poor live. Unofficial statistics also show that in Nigeria it is the poor man who takes home a paltry salary or that owns a small business that pays taxes while most of the big income earners evade taxation through corrupt means. The widening gap between the poor and the rich has led to massive urban drift which has worsened the conditions of the poor.

Gross socio-economic inequality has also been entrenched and most of those affected are from the rural oil producing areas. As Chimobi Ucha correctly reports:

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²⁰ USAID Report. Nigeria Economic Performance Assessment. Nathan Associates Inc. February, 2009, p. 21.

Inequality implies a concentration of a distribution, whether one is considering income, consumption or some other welfare indicators or attributes (see Oyekale, Oyekale and Adeoti, 2007). There was an increase in income disparity after the economic growth which Nigeria experienced between 1965-1975, and this income inequality has increased the dimension of poverty in the country (Oluwatayo, 2008, p. 1). The income inequality between the people in rural and urban areas in Nigeria is remarkably high, as those who live in the rural areas base all their income on agriculture which is today not a thriving sector in Nigeria as oil has taken over the economy.²¹

Talking of agriculture, repeated oil pollution has decimated much of the arable lands in the rural oil producing areas thereby making even subsistence agriculture difficult. Needless to say that there is no form of federal government support for these rural-based farmers. In the North for example, there are federal loan facilities often not repayable to farmers which are not available to the farmers in the East and Niger Delta areas.

It is important to highlight that one of such factors which has hampered Nigeria's agricultural sector is over-dependence of the economy on oil. Another is that most of the mechanized farmers in the North and West who benefit exclusively from federal government's Agric loan scheme are political farmers. As most of these loans are not repayable or monitored, it is given on ethnic lines and along power blocs. Recipients quickly divert the funds to areas of their material needs and desires. In most cases, those who receive these loans are already corrupt rich class who quickly lodge such monies in foreign accounts. Established farmers in the East and in the Niger Delta region as well as poor individuals in other parts of the country are struggling and cannot access federal Agric loan. Intending farmers are also discouraged from the plight of the existing ones. This is a worrisome economic injustice that plagues Nigeria's agricultural sector as in other sectors.

In the West and North, Industrialists easily access federal loan schemes which their counterparts in the East and Niger Delta areas could not. The 2006 USAID report states that:

Nigeria's economy is heavily industrialized for an African country, with an average of nearly 50 percent of GDP attributed to industry during the period 1999 to 2004. For 2004, industry accounted for approximately 56.9 percent of GDP, significantly higher than the LI-SSA average (21.2 percent) and the shares in Ghana (24.9 percent) and Cameroon (16.7 percent). The industrialization rate, however, reflects the importance of crude oil and natural gas production in Nigeria.²²

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²¹ Chimobi Ucha, "Poverty in Nigeria: Some Dimensions and Contributing Factors Global Majority". *E-Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (June 2010), p. 53: pp. 46-56.

²² USAID Report. Nigeria Economic Performance Assessment. Nathan Associates Inc. February, 2009, p. 7.

It is important to note the connection between industrialization and the oil sector in the passage above. Much of the funds for setting up new industries in Nigeria are accessed from the oil wealth and are available to tycoons from the West and the North and a few of their loyalists in other parts of the country. This explains why in Ota, Ogun state, the home town of Nigeria's President as at the time of this report who also was a military dictator during the oil boom in the 1970s, there are more industries than in all of the Niger Delta areas put together. Also, in Kaduna and Kano respectively, there are heavy industries (Petrochemical, textile, cement, building materials, food processing, etc.), financed from the oil wealth gotten from the East and its neighbors in the Niger Delta region. Most of the petrochemical industries are either in the North or in the West sourcing their raw materials from the oil producing areas in the East and Niger Delta areas. Needless to point out that employment into these heavy industries are also pinned down to ethnic lines. This reduces the poverty index in the West and North and increases it in the Niger Delta and the Eastern regions.

The major means of livelihood for the poverty ridden rural areas in Niger Delta and Eastern regions are farming and fishing in the coastal and inland waters. However, unmitigated oil spillages have rendered much of the arable land sterile and poisoned the fish in the rivers. Some of the lands have remained uncleaned and uncultivated for decades. Natives have to survive by scavenging. This has led to massive urban drift where the expectations have also been massively failed. This morning (October 2013), as I stood in front of my house in the Niger Delta urban City of Calabar, I witnessed a usual scenario; about nine children bearing large scavenging sacks sourcing recyclable materials like plastic, bottles, metal, etc. The oldest of them was about nine years while the youngest of the crew was about five. I interviewed them briefly and learned that none of them hails from Calabar or even its environs. Their parents had moved from hinterlands where millions of barrels of oil are pumped out every day. With their lands and rivers decimated and polluted by oil spillages, and no efforts made to clean them up and no compensation paid, these people had to move to urban centers. Like the nine children I saw this morning, I see hundreds of them each day as I go to work. These kids roam about fending for their families while their fellow children are in school. According to the 2006 USAID report,

Urbanization increased from 43.2 percent to 46.6 percent between 1999 and 2003, which is roughly equivalent to what is predicted by the regression benchmark, much higher than the LI-SSA average and lower than the 51.2 percent in Cameroon. Urbanization largely reflects the lack of viable opportunities in rural areas and has resulted in growing urban poverty and unemployment. The problems associated with urbanization help explain some of the serious environmental issues confronting Nigeria.

Such environmental issues as indiscriminate dumping of refuse resulting from poor waste management system and more seriously, oil spill pollution cause untold health and economic hardship to citizens. Those in the rural areas seek urban migration to find other means of livelihood having lost their land and river to oil spillage. Therefore, in a country of plenty where the majority wallow in abject poverty and a tiny minority choke in stupendous wealth one cannot rightly say that there is economic justice. Rather, the height of economic injustice in Nigeria has over the years led to serious socio-economic and political inequality across the national demography, regions and ethnicity.

Foundation of Disorder in Nigeria

Some researchers on Nigeria polity have found it convenient to identify Nigeria's main problems as Corruption²³ and Bad leadership²⁴. Amadi is not the only one who holds the moral position, many scholars before and after him share this opinion. Ben Eboh in his *Philosophy in the Growth of Nigeria* emphatically hammered on the issue of corruption or moral decadence as the chief undoing for the Nigerian state. As he puts it:

It is a known fact today that in Nigerian society both private and public sectors are morally bankrupt. Very few people ever ask what will be good for their neighbours. The majority of Nigerian citizens are ready to go to any place, any length and to use any means at their disposal whether fair or not to acquire whatever they want.²⁵

Eboh makes reference to the general attitude which has grown out of the disorderliness caused by ethnic and religious divide that nurtured great tolerance for the wrong set of societal values. Wole Soyinka also corroborates this when he stated in his satire "Sometime Wole, we have to do things which... which we know are wrong. Really bad. But this is the set up... there are things I have seen here which make me... disbelieve in such a thing as justice"²⁶. In the daily life in Nigeria both private and public, ethnic biases and religious bigotry dictate the flow of things to the point that what is lawful and most times what is proper/right take the back seat. The cause of justice in different spheres including the economic seems eternally derailed. Issues like this when assessed from the surface seem to point toward corruption in its simplistic outlook.

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²³ Elechi Amadi, *Ethics in Nigeria Culture*. Ibadan: Heinemann Ed. Publishers. 1982.

²⁴ Chinua Achebe, *The Trouble with Nigeria*. Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publication. 1983; Chinua Achebe, *There was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra*. London: Penguin Books, 2012.

²⁵ O. Ben Eboh, *Philosophy in the Growth of Nigeria*. Onitsha: Veritas Press, 1980, p. 10.

²⁶ Soyinka Wole, *The Man Died*. Penguin Books: England, 1978, p. 56.

Olatunde Oloko²⁷ was of this orientation in his discussion of the problem of Corruption in Nigeria.

There are others who would rather see bad leadership as the central problem in Nigeria. Their argument is that bad leadership engenders corruption and other less banal problems facing Nigeria. For Chinua Achebe:

That road to a remedy of Nigeria's political problems will not come easily. The key, as I see it, lies in the manner in which the leadership of the country is selected. When I refer to leadership I am really talking about leaders at every level of government and sphere of society, from the local government council and governors right up to the presidency.²⁸

Thus leadership stands at the center of Nigeria's problems for him. But Achebe is not alone in this assumption. Many others like Innocent Asouzu have expended ink and paper discussing this problem. On his own, Asouzu sees the placing of a square peg in a round hole in Nigerian leadership as the nemesis of the country²⁹. Olatunde Oloko corroborates that leadership is a basic problem for the Nigerian social system be they economic, political, educational, etc., due to qualitative incompetence³⁰. Lack of technical incompetence in science and technology are sometimes regarded by some³¹ as part of the main problems although this is not discussed at the same level with corruption and leadership.

However, we take a detour in this essay in giving prominence to ethnic/religious divide as the central problem of the Nigerian constitution. This is not the first time this view is held but what makes our effort unique is the fashion in which we knit every other problem and connect them to this using economic injustice as a case in point. Before now, some scholars have advanced this argument. The famous *Daily Times* columnist Olu Awotesu in keeping with this assumption declares:

Nigeria is indeed a sick country, sick and rotten all over. She is sick because we are not honest, we are not sincere. The military who came to save the situation, are no better. They appoint incompetent people as civil commissioners and top government functionaries. Double standard, cheating and sectionalism characterize our society.³²

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²⁷ Olatunde Oloko, *Whither Nigeria? 20 Basic Problems Yet Unsolved*. Lagos: Times Press, 1983, pp. 23-26.

²⁸ Chinua Achebe, *There was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra*. London: Penguin Books, 2012, pp. 244-245.

²⁹ Innocent Asouzu, *Effective Leadership and the Ambivalence of Human Interest. The Nigerian Paradox in a Complementary Perspective*. Calabar: University of Calabar Press, 2004.

³⁰ Olatunde Oloko, p. 103.

³¹ Ben Eboh, pp. 16-17; Innocent Asouzu, "Humanistic Education, Technology and National Development", *Journal of Education and Peace*, Vol. 2, No 1, Nov. 1996. Kanu Macaulay, "Toward a Philosophy of Indigenous Technology". A. F. Uduigwomen ed. *From Footmarks to Landmarks on African Philosophy*. 2nd ed. 2009. Lagos: O.O.P., pp. 328-352.

³² Olu Awotesu, "Ethnicity and Religion in Nigerian". *Daily Times*, Nov. 5, 1977.

Perhaps what Awotesu's passage above did not explain clearly is that the appointment of incompetent people, cheating and double standard which he says characterize the Nigerian polity were and are done in lieu of ethnic/religious loyalty, although his use of the term sectionalism did justice to that.

One writer who has advanced this position in the recent times is Matthew Kukah, the secretary to the Nigeria's Truth and Reconciliation Commission. In his book *Religion and Politics in Northern Nigeria since Independence* (Spectrum, 1994), he highlighted the religious side of the problem and in *Democracy and Civil Society in Nigeria* (Spectrum, 2002) he dwelt on the ethnic side. However, in his recent work *Witness to Justice: An insider's Account of Nigeria's Truth Commission*³³ he takes an incisive look at the systematic devaluation of human life which occurred in Nigeria during the years of military rule, and also hyped the culture of impunity that now pervades the Nigerian polity. *Witness to justice* tells a story of all forms of injustices that characterize daily life in Nigeria namely economic, social, educational and political.

In another work, Kukah states and correctly so that "The greatest source of tension in Nigeria has been the lack of an adequate power sharing mechanism to institutionalize and guarantee the pursuit of a good society based on justice, equity and fairness"³⁴. This is line with the argument of our essay here that the control of political power which falls along the lines of ethnicity and religious divide is the basic problem in Nigeria which has gone to create others such as corruption, bad leadership, etc. These latter problems are rather symptoms of the main problem. Even if they can be defended to stand on their own, they would still be secondary. Kukah in support of this view further observes that: "Politics in Nigeria has been dominated by region, religion and ethnicity. Whereas others navigate around the themes of ethnicity or region, the Muslims continue to talk about one North which, intrinsically, is synonymous with Islam. The anxieties of the non-Muslim minorities still persist largely because, whereas they are geographically considered to be part of the North, they do not believe that they are getting a fair share in the power game because of their religious affiliation. And, clearly, those within the Middle Belt who have become Muslim, as it is the case in parts of Benue, Adamawa, Plateau and others, have seen a noticeable change in their bureaucratic, professional, economic or political lives. This remains an area of tension". He continued:

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³³ Matthew Kukah, *Witness to Justice: An insider's Account of Nigeria's Truth Commission*. Ibadan: Bookcraft, 2011.

³⁴ Matthew Kukah. "Christian-Muslim Relations: The Nigerian Situation". Retrieved from www.duq.edu/.../Kukah_Christian-Muslim, p. 2.

“At the national level, the perceived monopoly and domination of the levers of power by the Muslim North has remained a matter of concern for others in the country. For example, Nigeria has had a total of 13 heads of State. Out of this total only 5 have been Christians. Under the military, General Gowon was the only non-Muslim who became the Head of State. Some of these concerns have filtered into the discussions surrounding the Jonathan Presidency the rise of the Boko Haram insurgency which has been subjected to various interpretations. Clearly, these anxieties account for a substantial percentage of the crisis of confidence between Muslims and Christians in Nigeria”.³⁵

From the above submission, it is obvious that to tackle the many problems which have disordered the systems in Nigeria, a frontal thrust would be required to nip ethnicity and religious nationalisms to the board. Inter-cultural dialogue, the type that is proposed by the presidency is a veritable philosophical tool that has the capacity to dissolve such problems by institutionalizing ethics of fairness and return order to the disordered society. But the ultimate question however is: it may have worked for countries like South Africa, will it work for Nigeria?

National Dialogue in pursuit of Order

In his October 1, 2013 Independence day broadcast President Goodluck Jonathan announced the setting up of an advisory committee on sovereign National Dialogue. This has been a clamour of many Nigerians short-changed on the basis of ethnic and religious divide for decades. In his words:

Fellow Nigerians, our Administration has taken cognizance of suggestions over the years by well-meaning Nigerians on the need for a national dialogue on the future of our beloved country... When there are issues that constantly stoke tension and bring about friction, it makes perfect sense for the interested parties to come together to discuss... In demonstration of my avowed belief in the positive power of dialogue in charting the way forward, I have decided to set up an advisory committee whose mandate is to establish the modalities for a national dialogue or conference... The committee will also design a framework and come up with recommendations as to the form, structure and mechanism of the process.³⁶

It has been a strong belief in some quarters for decades that such a national dialogue is imperative in finding a solution to Nigeria’s complex ethnic and religious problems. As a minority president who ascended to power by accident following the death of Yar’ Adua, an Hausa,³⁷ Jonathan

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³⁵ Matthew Kukah. “Christian-Muslim Relations: The Nigerian Situation”. Retrieved from www.duq.edu/.../Kukah_Christian-Muslim, pp. 2-3.

³⁶ UPDATE: Nigeria to hold national conference as Jonathan sets up Advisory Committee Premium Times Published: October 1,2013 <http://premiumtimesng.com/news/145787-jonathan-sets-up-advisory-council-on-national-conference.html>.

³⁷ Aljazeera, “Nigeria’s president Yar’Adua dies”. Last Modified: 06 May 2010 06:44 GMT <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2010/05/20105523627997165.html>.

has been at the grind stone of the Hausa – Yoruba bloc who had controlled political power since the civil war times. Consistent attempts have been made at all quarters to make the country ungovernable for him and possibly force him out of power. Some say the creation of Boko Haram in the North was specifically to disrupt his government. As Kukah observes:

Some of these concerns have filtered into the discussions surrounding the Jonathan Presidency and the rise of the Boko Haram insurgency which has been subjected to various interpretations. Clearly, these anxieties account for a substantial percentage of the crisis of confidence between Muslims and Christians in Nigeria.³⁸

In Nigeria, it can be argued following Kukah above that everything has ethnic and religious interpretation because these are the two main problems undermining the country. In confirmation Kukah further states that “Politics in Nigeria has been dominated by region, religion and ethnicity”.³⁹ Over the years, ethnic and religious nationalisms have effectively replaced true nationalism.⁴⁰ Jonathan’s declaration of national conference was hilariously received by all the ethnic groups that have been shortchanged over the years except the Hausa – Yoruba bloc who are skimming to regain power. Recently, the *Punch Newspaper* reports that Malam El-Rufai (an Hausa), Former Minister of the Federal Capital Territory and Deputy National Secretary of the All Progressives Congress (a party formed from the alliance of a Yoruba Party ACN and an Hausa party CPC), said at a Liberty Radio program in Kaduna that “President Goodluck Jonathan was playing ethnic and religious politics to divert attention from bad governance”.⁴¹ So ethnicity and religious divides are common indices in Nigeria polity and inform interpretations to everything. Duo has created massive problems including economic injustice in Nigeria. The idea of a national dialogue muted for decades is to find a way to address these cankerworms which have caused massive disorder in Nigeria.

There are various forms of disorder which ethnic and religious divides have caused in Nigeria namely political, social, moral, economic, etc. In this essay, we narrow our focus to the economic dimension. We have

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³⁸ Matthew Kukah. “Christian-Muslim Relations: The Nigerian Situation”. Retrieved from www.duq.edu/.../Kukah_Christian-Muslim, p. 3.

³⁹ Matthew Kukah. “Christian-Muslim Relations: The Nigerian Situation”. Retrieved from www.duq.edu/.../Kukah_Christian-Muslim, p. 2.

⁴⁰ Jonathan Chimakonam and Joseph Ogar, *Philosophical Consideration of Democratic Leadership in Nigeria: A Loss of the Nationalist Ideals*. Paper presented at An International Conference in honour of Dr. Oladipo Fashina, Department of Philosophy, OAU, Ile-Ife 7th-9th May 2013.

⁴¹ Godwin Isenyo, “Jonathan playing ethnic, religious politics – el-Rufai”. *Punch Newspaper*, August 11, 2013 <http://www.punchng.com/news/jonathan-playing-ethnic-religious-politics-el-rufai>.

stated in the section above that the conditions of economic injustice are all apparent in Nigeria. We have highlighted various forms and types of economic injustice in Nigeria and we have also outlined the levels at which various economic injustices are perpetrated. And our basic argument is that lying beneath the manifestation, forms and perpetration of economic injustice in Nigeria are the two perennial problems of ethnic and religious divide. Many Nigerians especially the perennially shortchanged believe as President Jonathan reiterated that the philosophical tool of dialogue might be the only solution to these menace. Hence the call for Sovereign National dialogue. The question now is: are the conditions for genuine dialogue present in Nigeria?

Conditions for Genuine Dialogue

There have been various attempts at dialogue in Nigeria especially in the religious which have not yielded any positive results as Kukah observes in one particular instance of inter-religious dialogue, “First, the two Muslim and Christian bodies, making up *the Nigeria Inter-religious Council (NIREC)*, could not agree on who would Chair the meetings and had to settle for a position of Co-Chairmen”.⁴² This is because the conditions for genuine dialogue are absent. There are some basic conditions for genuine dialogue which we shall like to highlight. They include: trust, sincerity, understanding the other, compromise and consensus. There are probably more according to circumstances and contexts. In the case of Nigeria the above listed are imperative.

Trust: there has to be *trust* among over 250 language groups in Nigeria and among different religious sects. There are also over 1000 variants of African Traditional Religions in addition to Christianity and Islam. However, the tension has always been between Christianity and Islam. The point is that the experiences of the Civil war (1968-1970) culminated in great intrigues, betrayal, hate, suspicion, bloodletting and sometimes pogrom etc., and these have characterized the relationships among these tribes since then. These have shattered the ideal of *trust* among ethnic and religious groups in Nigeria. The present circumstances have not created a sign of change in this orientation. One therefore, can say that in the absence of trust, the proposed national dialogue might not yield positive results toward restoration of order.

Sincerity: without the ideal of trust, it is hard to imagine how delegates from different ethnic nationalities and religious faiths can relate to one another with sincerity. It is apt that each party to the dialogue would aim

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⁴² Matthew Kukah, “Christian-Muslim Relations: The Nigerian Situation”. Retrieved from www.duq.edu/.../Kukah_Christian-Muslim p. 5.

at cheating others. And since no side would agree to be cheated, the proposed national dialogue would most likely end in failure.

Understanding the other: for a truly genuine dialogue to take place, the parties to the charter must have sincerity of purpose which will compel them to set aside their individual idiosyncrasies and seek to understand the position and plight of one another. It is in this sort of attitude that genuine problems can be identified and genuine solutions proffered.

Compromise: One of the most important aspects of a genuine dialogue which makes it effective as a philosophical tool of solving intercultural problems is compromise. Every party must be ready to compromise. But compromise cannot be achieved if the parties to a dialogue do not trust one another, are not sincere and do not understand one another.

Consensus: central to the goal of a genuine dialogue is consensus. The consensus principle is different from the majoritarian principle as practiced in liberal democracy. In the latter, agreements are reached on the basis of majority decision but in the former, agreements are forged from the decision of all⁴³. It is this common consent that gifts dialogue with the power of lasting solution.

However, the inference with regards to these five conditions of a genuine dialogue takes the logical structures of modus ponens and hypothetical syllogism. If the first three holds then the last two would hold. The event of nr. 1 holding implies nr. 2, nr. 2 implies nr. 3, nr. 3 implies nr. 4 and nr. 4 in turn implies nr. 5 which means nr. 1 implies nr. 5 all things being equal.

In the present Nigerian polity rift with ethnic and religious acrimony and hate, it is clear that the conditions of genuine dialogue are not present and so, it is hard to imagine that the proposed Sovereign National Dialogue will yield fruitful results.

The set-up in Nigeria therefore contrasts with basic requirements for a would-be successful dialogue. In this regard we have developed three basic principles that characterize (1) how a people desirous of intercultural reconciliation through genuine dialogue ought to think toward each other and (2) how a people fundamentally opposed to such ideal of reconciliation actually think. We divide the principles into two namely; *the twin reciprocal principles of intercultural dialogue* which are two in number and the third one which we shall call the *dissonance principle*. While the first two describe the attitude in (1) above the last one describes the attitude in (2).

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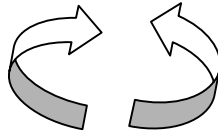
⁴³ K. A. Busia, *Africa in Search of Democracy*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967, p. 28; Nwala Uzodinma, *Igbo Philosophy*. London: Lantern Books, 1985, p. 168.

The twin principle states: for any rational entity desirous of intercultural reconciliation through genuine dialogue it is imperative that he (a) thinks toward home and (b) thinks from home in reciprocal mode. In thinking toward home he essentially seeks to compromise and concede some positions of the other whereas in thinking from home he extends some of his positions which he expects the other to concede and such must be positions which he is genuinely convinced that he would have no hesitations conceding if positions are switched. These twin principles are the bed-rock of compromise in any genuine intercultural dialogue. Parties to a dialogue therefore must have this attitude. In the event of this not being the case, the third principle becomes inevitable, i.e., parties carry a dissonant attitude.

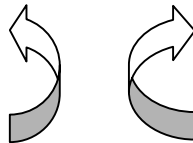
The dissonance principle therefore states: for any entity fundamentally opposed to such ideal of reconciliation through the tool of intercultural dialogue it is inevitable that he (c) thinks at home. In thinking at home he seeks the advancement of his positions, conceding none to the other and expecting the other to concede all of his positions. He thinks at home and does not have the attitude of reaching out.

The attitudes represented by these two sets of principles can be diagrammed as follows:

Attitude diagram of the twin principles:



Attitude diagram of the dissonance principle:



In the Nigerian context, following from the entrenched distrust and disgust for one another among different ethnic groups and religious sects the attitude is that of dissonance. May we also observe from repeated occurrence that in some cases where interests clash, the ethnic loyalty usually takes precedence over religious affiliation. The reasons for this are a subject for another essay.

Conclusion

From the forgoing it would appear that our conclusion in this essay is that though economic justice in the mode of Aristotle's and Rawls's provisions are vital for Nigeria's restitution, this can only be made possible by a genuine national dialogue which will effectively address the fundamental problems of ethnic and religious divisions which lie beneath all other manifestations such as economic injustice. Kukah however, reminds us that "If we are to be guided by the empirical evidence, it will be right to say that after almost fifty years, not much progress has been made in the way of dialogue".⁴⁴ Evidently, as we argued in the essay, the present social relations and circumstances in Nigeria do not make way for a genuine dialogue and as such we conclude that the proposed national dialogue might not resolve the problems undergirding Nigeria's unjust economic practices. These problems we have shown are ethnic and religious divisions. We have also shown that corruption and bad leadership are by-products of these basic problems.

Political office holders who control power in Nigeria are ethnic and religious loyalists. Their loyalties lie with their ethnic and religious groups which put them in office and can bring them down. There is no national spirit but regional, ethnic and religious nationalisms. Incompetent people as above indicated by Awotesu are appointed to political office based on the recommendations/demands of ethnic and religious blocs. These people go ahead to enact corrupt practices and escape punishment based on ethnic/religious sentiments. Leaders are forced to keep a blind eye by their ethnic/religious bloc because the culprit is one of their own. These are the two ways corruption and bad leadership manifest under the gentle inspiration of ethnic and religious divisions. This is why Kukah maintains that "The greatest source of tension in Nigeria has been the lack of an adequate power sharing mechanism to institutionalize and guarantee the pursuit of a good society based on justice, equity and fairness".⁴⁵ The philosophical tool of genuine national dialogue can address this and restore order to a disordered Nigerian society but the conditions for such are not present which is a defect for the proposed national dialogue in Nigeria.

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⁴⁴ Matthew Kukah, "Christian-Muslim Relations: The Nigerian Situation". Retrieved from www.duq.edu/.../Kukah_Christian-Muslim, p. 1.

⁴⁵ Matthew Kukah, "Christian-Muslim Relations: The Nigerian Situation". Retrieved from www.duq.edu/.../Kukah_Christian-Muslim, p. 2.