

GADAMER'S FUSION OF HORIZON: A PANACEA FOR TOLERABLE CO-EXISTENCE IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper searches for a solution to the high level of intolerance among Nigerians and in the Nigerian Nation. Nigeria as a multi-cultural and pluralistic society has been faced with so many ethnic challenges, uncountable religious fights and multiple tribal killings. Every tribe is prejudiced against the other. People from one tribe tend to see people of other tribes as second class citizens. Intolerance has remained on the increase because we have refused to go beyond our ethnic prejudices against one another. Thus, Nigeria is more divided now than ever before. These challenges have resulted into untold hardships, loss of loved ones, denial of merited opportunities and so forth to many Nigerians. This paper is an application of Gadamer's fusion of horizon as a model to solving the high level of intolerance among the various ethnic and religious groups in Nigeria. By textual analysis, it highlights the centrality of the principles of reciprocity, equality and mutuality in creating an open-minded and tolerant society.

Key words: *Intolerance, ethnic biases, prejudices, fusion of horizon, dialogue.*

Background to Study

It is a common saying in Nigeria that our diversity should unite us instead of dividing us. This cliché portends that Nigeria is a pluralistic and multi-ethnic state. Secondly it is a call to harness the strength of our differences in order to build a more egalitarian society. However, the question of how we can overcome these known differences and move to the desired unity is very far from reality judging from the actions and inactions of both those who govern and those governed. Many Nigerians are very ethnic conscious and that is why whatever is from one's ethnic group should be accepted by all members of the state. The frightening thing about this is that it has become a norm in the Nigerian state. Thus when people from a particular ethnic group support a corrupt person from their ethnic nationality, they don't do it that corruption in itself is good but because that corrupt person is their own and should not be prosecuted or jailed if found guilty (because it is their corruption). This scenario is very common among Nigerians that no ethnic group can be exonerated from this cankerworm.

Consequently, Nigeria has become a state where mediocrity thrives because of ethnic syndrome. The disturbing question here is: how can Nigeria

develop in situations like this. The major ethnic groups, i.e. the Hausa-Fulanis, the Yorubas and the Igbos are all suspicious of one another. There is lack of trust among the major ethnic groups and this manifests itself in lack of tolerance of one another. The resultant effect of this is the incessant ethnic crisis which often manifests itself in religious crisis. Religious crisis has become so rampant in Nigeria because not only are we divided along cultural lines, we are also divided along religious lines. Thus the majority Hausa-Fulani who are Muslims claim that Islam is their birth right while some Igbos and some Yorubas claim they are the genuine Christians. It is therefore not surprising that an Hausa-Fulani Muslim sees a Yoruba or Igbo Muslim as a fake Muslim. In some cases, you hear them calling this group of people "Chris-Mus," meaning partly Christian and partly Muslim and therefore must not be treated as pure Muslims. This can also be said of those who feel Christianity is their birth right. All these fallacious positions are, because we think our culture and religion are the best. This ethnocentric attitude remains the bane of intolerance among the various ethnic groups that make up the Nigerian state. This is a major factor while many Nigerians remain poor in the midst of plenty. It is the cause of many wanton destructions of lives and properties of one ethnic nationality by another. This could be part of the reason why herdsmen would want to destroy the crops of the farmers and even kill the farmers, after all they are from an inferior group to theirs.

The issue of intolerance in Nigeria is a well-known phenomenon to Nigerians. Many of us have been affected in one way or the other as a result of the consequences of intolerance be it in the religious, political or cultural or tribal domains. Though we have been told to let our differences to unite us but how this will be made possible is still a major question in need of answers. This research paper therefore is a focus on how we can actually be united even with our differences. Nigerians can only co-exist peacefully when we become tolerant of each other; when we abandon some of our illegitimate prejudices against each other and allow our legitimate prejudices to enable us fuse our horizons with that of others. By so doing our toleration of one another will be based on the fact that we understand why they act the way they do.

Ethnic Structure in Nigeria

Nigeria came into existence as a state with the 1914 amalgamation of the northern and southern protectorates. This amalgamation was however without due consultation among the ethnic nationalities that make up the Nigerian state. Ayoade in Usuh avers that "Nigeria as a political state, is more or less a

forced brotherhood and sisterhood.”¹ Though without proper consultations, Nigeria today is made up of many ethnic groups that ranges in different sizes. These different sizes of ethnic groups speak different languages. Nevertheless, of the hundreds of languages spoken by the different ethnic groups, three languages are widely spoken and they make up a greater percentage of the population. These are the Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo.

The ethnic structure of Nigeria also includes other ethnic groups who live around or close to the three major ethnic groups. In the East are the Annang, Ibibio, Oron, Efik, Ijaw and the Oginis. In the West we have the Edo (Bini) and Urhobo. In the North we have the Kanuri, the Tiv, Igbirra, Idoma, Igala and Birom. According to Usuh “Nigeria at independence was a federation of three regions, each of which was a bewildering agglomeration of ethnic nationalities.”² Today Nigeria is made up of thirty-six states, 774 local government councils and a federal capital at Abuja.

From the fore-going it is clear to us that Nigeria is a multi-cultural as well as multi-ethnic state. Having the divergence of culture and pluralistic ethnic status, Nigerians are very ethnic conscious. Our ethnic consciousness has led us to situations of competitive interactions which has led to series of intolerance and suspicion of other ethnic groups. Each ethnic group is prejudiced against the others. We all grew up believing all the things our ethnic groups told us about us and about others. We have not been able to go beyond these ethnic prejudices, we live with them and we allow them to inform our opinions and even behaviours towards the other ethnic groups. These initially held beliefs make it difficult for us to tolerate people of other ethnic nationalities. Hence the need for a way out of these woods. We therefore propose Gadamer’s fusion of horizon as a way out to enable us tolerate each other and have a peaceful co-existence in the land.

Gadamer’s Fusion of Horizons

The theory of fusion of horizons (*Horizontverschmelzung*) is a master stroke in Gadamer’s hermeneutics or theory of interpretation. It is a description of what happens when we understand an object of knowledge. In Gadamer’s hermeneutics the process of understanding a reality is initiated by the prejudice the knowing subject have about the reality. For him prejudice plays very positive role in the process of knowing. Thus we approach the reality that we want to understand with whatever thing we may have known about it. All the unverified information we may have had about the reality form our pre-

¹ Ayoade in Francis Usuh, “True Federalism as a Remedy for Ethnic Politics in Nigeria” in *The Oracle: International Journal of Culture, Religion and Society*. Vol.2 No.2, Dec. 2006, p.95.

² Francis Usuh, “True Federalism as a Remedy for Ethnic Politics”, p.94

judgement (*pre-judicium*) or prejudice about the thing and they constitute the grounds we occupy in trying to understand that reality. They are likened to the Bergsonia baggage of the past we carry in order to understand the present and make projections into the future.

For Gadamer, understanding is an “effect of history”. This means that our understanding happens within a given historical consciousness. A realization of this fact brings with it the awareness of the hermeneutical situation. The hermeneutical situation is what Gadamer calls ‘horizon’ (*horizont*). This therefore means that our understanding and interpretation always happen from a particular situation. Thus the knowing subject approaches the object of knowledge from his particular horizon. According to him “every finite present has its limitations and that an essential part of the concept of situation is horizon.”³ Generally we define horizon as the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point. Having a horizon means knowing the relative significance of everything within the horizon. Commenting on Gadamer’s concept of horizon Barthold notes that there are two main features of horizon from his perspectives. First, the concept of horizon suggests the situated and perspectival nature of knowing.

Secondly horizon stresses the open and dynamic nature of knowing.⁴ Our knowing is perspectival in nature because we all approach the object of our knowledge from our given situation.

It is dynamic because as you move closer to your horizon it keeps widening more and more. According to Weinsheimer “our own horizon is constantly in the process of formation not least through our encounters with the past. It does not remain static, nor is its limit permanently circumscribed like a circle in which we are forever enclosed.”⁵

Understanding therefore is a process of fusion of horizons. Understanding happens according to Gadamer when the interpreter’s horizon is fused with that of the interpreted. It is a vital relationship between the ‘text’ and the ‘present’ where the text represents, history or tradition or the past (object of knowledge) and the present which is the interpreter (the knowing subject).

Thus when an interpreter understands the past it does not mean a separation of two horizons but a giving birth of a new horizon as a result of

³ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, London: Sheed and Ward, 1975, p. 268.

⁴ L.S. Barthold, “Hans-Georg Gadamer” in Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, retrieved @ www.iep.utm.edu/gadamer on 05/9/2019

⁵ J.C. Weinsheimer, *Gadamer's Hermeneutics: A Reading of Truth and Method*; (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), p.183

the fusion of the two horizons. Onyenekwe commenting on this notes that, “understanding through interpretation only happens when there is a coming together of horizons of the interpreter and the interpreted. The hermeneut must leave his contemporary criteria and prejudices and place himself in the situation of the other.”⁶ At the point of fusion, the interpreter must not see himself as passing into an alien horizon unconnected to him. He fuses his horizon with the horizon of the particular history and

... together they constitute the one great horizon that moves from within and beyond the one frontiers of the present, embraces the historical depths of our self-consciousness. It is in fact, a single horizon that embraces everything contained in historical consciousness. Our own past, and that other past towards which our historical consciousness is directed, help to shape this moving horizon out of which human life always lives, and which determines it as tradition.⁷

We understand when we place ourselves within a situation. We must imagine this situation and bring ourselves into it. Thus to understand others there is need for us to place ourselves into their situations thereby becoming aware of the indissolubility of their individuality and otherness.

Factors that Enable the Fusion of Horizon

We have identified three basic factors that must necessarily be present for any form of fusion of horizons leading to understanding to take place from the Gadamarian perspective. These are prejudice, dialogue and mutual respect for one another. Let us briefly highlight these factors below before relating them to solving the challenges of intolerance in Nigeria.

Prejudice: One of the major contributions to human knowledge by Gadamer is his reinvention of prejudice. He assigned positive roles to prejudice in the process of human knowing. For Gadamer, it is the prejudice we have about a thing that opens us up into dialogue with the object. Thus we do not approach our object of knowledge with a *tabula rasa* kind of mindset. We begin our quest to know a thing deeper from the opinions we may have had about it. Gadamer’s hermeneutics is a relationship that exists between the familiar and the strange. The familiar here are the pre-judgements an interpreter has about the subject while the strange are things about the object the subject is yet to know. He moves from what he knows to the strange (unknown).

⁶ C. C. Onyenekwe, *Hermeneutics in Has-Georg Gadamer: A Philosophical Appraisal*, An Unpublished PhD. Dissertation, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, 2018, p. 83

⁷Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 270.

Gadamer actually made a distinction between illegitimate prejudice and legitimate prejudice. Through the process of question and answer or dialectics which actually is the foundation of fusion of horizon, the illegitimate or unfounded prejudices get filtered off while the legitimate ones become the horizon that get fused together leading to understanding not determined by the knowing subject or the object of knowledge.

Dialogue: No understanding will take place if there is no form of dialogue between the interpreter and the interpreted. Dialogue therefore is a major factor that enhances the fusion of horizons. The interpreter must dialogue with the object of knowledge and also allow himself to be questioned by the object even as he questions the object in the process of the dialogue. The dialogue is meant to open both parties up to each other. Kogler was quick to note that

Gadamer's analysis of the relation between an interpreter and a text is convincingly modelled after the real conversation between two subjects, because as in real dialogue we are aiming to understand what the other says by following his or her thoughts and to engage in an exchange that mutually adjusts and respects the two perspectives; our own and the one of the other.⁸

Openness can only be possible when both parties are very honest to each other. They ought to respond to questions honestly and ask honest questions too. They must not ask questions in order to show off but to seek for genuine clarifications. It should be made clear that openness however is consequent to the structure of questions asked. Thus, when one asks a provocative question, he should not be surprised to get a provocative answer back. We must note then that our encounter with any reality begins with the kind of questions we are able to ask. The questions raised in the real sense set the direction of the inquiry and it turns to be the basis of our experience.

That one is able to ask questions on any other matter alludes to the fact that the person wants to know. It is against this backdrop that Gadamer asserts that "in order to be able to ask, one must want to know, which involves knowing that one does not know."⁹ It is through the process of dialogue and question asking that things about the subject and object are revealed.

Mutual Respect: We cannot talk of having a successful dialogue if there is no mutual respect among the interpreter and the interpreted. Both must see themselves as partners in progress as they realize that they all have their stories to tell. The interpreter must not act as if the burden of understanding begins

⁸ Hans-Herbert Kogler, "A Critique of Dialogue in Philosophical Hermeneutics" in *Journal of Dialogue Studies*, vol. 2, No. 1 (2014), p.49

⁹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 327

and ends with him. He must bear in mind that the object is also an active and not a passive participant in the knowing process.

It will be interesting to state at this juncture that our theoretical framework in this work may raise some questions in the mind of some critical thinkers. It could be asked, what is the possibility of actualizing this idea of adopting Gadamer's theory of horizon as a panacea for tolerance in Nigeria considering the fact of human nature? To our mindset, the question of human nature all depends on the perspective from which one looks at the nature of man. If one's understanding of human nature is inclined towards Hobbesian purview which conceives the nature of man as being self-centered, primitive and egoistic, then our theory may not be applicable. However, when one understands the nature of man from the Aristotelian understanding of the nature of man as a political animal, a social animal, a being with speech and moral reasoning who can only realize himself in the society, then this work becomes justified as well as applicable. Aristotle further in his famous work *Nicomachean Ethics* describes man a being that is always desirous to know. Thus man has the capability to know as a rational animal. Again in Socrates, a nexus between knowledge and action is established when he asserted that "to know the good is to do the good." Hence knowledge is a virtue while ignorance is vice.

If it is true that all men desire to know, then our actions and inaction should be knowledge based. Our relationships and interactions with one another should be based on what one knows about the other. Thus I relate to you based on what I know about you just as you relate to me based on what you know about me and because we both understand ourselves, we are able to keep aside our differences or even tolerate our differences.

It may be very true that it is not easy dealing with religious fundamentalists, ideologists and many die-hard believers of a particular course. One thing common to people of this category is that they are closed minded. They find it difficult accommodating other views that are not in line with what they believe in. But it is the candid opinion of the writer that with adequate re-orientation and education such people will gradually open up to new ideas and ways of doing things. The ideologies or part of the ideologies people may hold tenaciously may be the prejudices that could serve as a basement upon which the dialogue will stand on.

To the question of, why, when and how much are people reciprocal and tolerant has been addressed long ago even by the Igbo cosmological worldview contained in the short phrase "live and let live" "*onyebiri, onyebiri*" we also see it in another saying "*elechaagharakanwannenannanwannegiebi*" 'brothers can only leave in peace by tolerance.' Not minding how self-centred man has become, these values are enshrined even in our cultures and traditions. Humans

generally are wired differently; we have different psychological dispositions such that no two brothers are the same. Even in the families, people are different yet they tolerate their differences and co-exist together. Even among the same tribe, people are still prejudiced among themselves. The question is how do you manage the prejudices, do you allow it to divide all the more or do you stand on it and seek for better understanding of who you are and who the other person is?

Gadamer's Fusion of Horizons and Tolerance in Nigeria

Our major interest in this applied study is to identify some relevant values in Gadamer's fusion of horizons that can enhance tolerance and peaceful co-existence among Nigerians. It has been pointed out that the major challenge we have in Nigeria is that we are prejudiced against each other. We also have the feeling of superiority over people who are not from our own side of the nation.

It is not completely bad that we are prejudiced against each other but what has remained bad in its entirety is that we have failed to go beyond our prejudices. Our prejudices against each other are supposed to lead us to a more universal appreciation of each other. Our prejudices are meant to lead us into dialoguing with people of other parts of the nation. Instead of this being the case, we have allowed our prejudices to lead us to hatred of one another, wanton killings, violence and other forms of societal menace.

Gadamer's fusion of horizons however can serve as a template for us in Nigeria today if we must peacefully co-exist with each other bearing in mind our differences. Nigerians are expected to approach each other with our loads of prejudices bearing in mind that the prejudices we have are manifestations of our history and life experiences. With our prejudices, we must enter into dialogical dialectics with people of other ethnic nationalities. The dialectical dialogue should enable us to ask questions and allow ourselves to be questioned. With openness to each other it is expected that our illegitimate prejudices will be filtered off while the legitimate ones will lead us to a new horizon which is a new understanding and appreciation of each other.

Gadamer's fusion of horizon bridges the subject-object dichotomy that became so prominent in the history of mankind as a result of the emphasis on methods. We want to state categorically that in Nigeria, we are dichotomized on ethnic, religious, political and economic grounds. In Gadamer's fusion of horizons he made it clear that at the point of the fusion "there is a birth and growth of something reducible to neither the interpreter nor the text, nor their conjunction."¹⁰ This means that both the person knowing and the person

¹⁰ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 311.

known does not preside over the understanding of their interactions nor its outcome.

Nigerians therefore need to go into serious interactions with one another in an attempt to filter off their prejudices, they should come forth with their prejudices and ask relevant questions about what they think about the other tribes and be open to also answer questions from others about themselves. With these we will all come to a new realization and a new understanding about the others as they also have a new and better understanding about us.

For the fact that we now allow some form of interactions amongst us in our quest to understand others and also be understood by them, we will come to the findings that we are not the conquering warrior but rather active participants in the process of knowing. This alone can transform the way we see people from other ethnic nationalities. With this experience we will no longer have the feeling that we are separated from each other because of where we are coming from. According to Gadamer "... this kind of experience is a moral phenomenon as is the knowledge acquired through the experience, the understanding of the other person."¹¹ Nigerians need to see each other as another them, thus instead of having an 'I-It' kind of relationship they should strive for 'I- Thou' relationship. The I-Thou relationship enables you to be conscious of the fact that just as the 'I' has his history, culture and tradition, the 'Thou' too has his history, culture and tradition. With this the 'I' can share in the history, culture and tradition of the 'Thou' for a better understanding of the 'I and the Thou'.

Furthermore, a better understanding of the I and the Thou cannot but end in a tolerable co-existence among Nigerians. Nigeria will begin to see themselves belonging to each other. Belonging together according to Gadamer ... means being able to listen to one another. When two people understand each other, this does not mean that one person "understands" the other, in the sense of surveying him. Similarly, to hear and obey someone does not mean simply that we do blindly what the other desires. We call such a person a slave. Openness to the other, then includes the acknowledgement that I must accept some things that are against myself, even though there is no one else who asks this of me.¹²

Kogler in addition to this submits that

... a successful dialogue will always transcend the individual perspectives involved and enlarge the views of each participant, whether it leads to a new shared view or whether it brings out irreconcilable differences, and a real dialogue is always an event

¹¹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 324

¹² Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 270.

that is based on prior background understandings that help actualise a process that is beyond the subjective control of each of the agents involved.¹³

It is therefore obvious that Nigerians must appreciate the role of dialogue in peaceful co-existence. Genuine dialogue should make one humbler because the outcome often shows situatedness of our assumptions and beliefs. It also shows limitedness of what we claim to have known and more importantly there is a need for improvement on what we think we know of the other persons. Finally, we must accept things that are against us in the spirit of openness and agreement.

Other interesting values inherent in Gadamer's fusion of horizon are the values of mutuality and reciprocity. The principle of mutuality will enable both participants to treat each other with respect. This principle should make us see ourselves as partners in progress.

A mutual relationship is always a win-win kind of relationship. It is a relationship among 'equals.' Because of its intrinsic nature it cannot but guarantee tolerable co-existence. We then need to begin to see people from other ethnic nationalities as partners in progress. Just as no fusion takes place when the subject of a text derides his object so also when we deride ourselves we remain at the level of prejudice and the outcome will be lack of understanding and perpetual intolerance among us.

Reciprocity is another salient value from Gadamer's fusion of horizon that is also very necessary if we desire a tolerable co-existence among the various ethnic groups in Nigeria where people will have some level of trust for each other. Understanding for Gadamer happens as a form of interaction which leads to assimilation, integration and application. Through the dialectical process of question and answer, the interpreting subject interacts with the interpreted object. This procedure takes place in the form of normal human conversation pattern. Mutuality between the interpreting subject and the interpreted object is made possible on the grounds of reciprocity. Gadamer therefore opines that

... the experience of the 'Thou' and of understanding it is that the 'Thou' is acknowledged as a person, but that despite the involvement of the 'Thou', the understanding of the letter is still a form of self-relatedness. This proceeds from the dialectical appearance that the dialect of the 'I – Thou' relation bring with it. This relation is not immediate, but reflective. To every claim there is a counter-claim.¹⁴

¹³ Hans-Herbert Kogler, "A Critique of Dialogue in Philosophical Hermeneutics" p.49.

¹⁴ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 322.

The dialectical relationship is a to and fro movement of ideas that enables each to question freely the claims of the other and allow the other to also question your claims. We are free to hold any prejudice against the other, but we must be willing to allow the other to question our prejudices as we also question theirs.

The fundamental solution to ethnic conflicts all over the world has remained dialogue. Nigerians must not shy away from dialogue. It is through dialogue especially genuine dialogue conducted with a sense of humility, mutuality, equality and reciprocity that can lead to the understanding of why an ethnic group thinks, believes and even behaves the way they do. People have failed to tolerate each other because they lack the understanding of why the other are the way they are. This understanding should not be just about the other person but also about myself because it should enable me to understand that we are differently configured by our history, experiences, culture and tradition. The end result of this form of dialogue may not be immediate, but it must be reflective. The parties involved must be very reflective of their position and that of the other. It should be done with open-mindedness knowing very well that no one is trying to outsmart the other. They must be open to counter claims to their various claims. They must allow their ideas to be questioned thoroughly and must remain open-minded to accept any counter-claim to their ideas that are better, more reasonable and for the peaceful co-existence of everyone. This is what Gadamer would call the dialectic reciprocity which simply leads to openness.

Summary and Conclusion

There is no gain saying that there is an urgent need for peaceful co-existence in Nigeria today. This common desire of many Nigerians however, can be assured if and only if we begin to tolerate each other. This paper agrees with Aristotle that man is a political animal as well as a social animal. It maintains that man is morally rational and has that ability to understand himself, others and even his environment. The paper further reasoned that the easiest way to tolerate each other is by understanding what they do, how they do it and above all why they do it. Getting to this point is actually the point of this paper. The paper therefore adopts Gadamer's fusion of horizon as a platform to stand on in order to achieve this task. The work acknowledges the relevance of our legitimate prejudices in the path to knowing but nevertheless calls for a transition beyond the prejudices. Our prejudices will enable us to initiate the required dialogue with the other but it is left for us to go beyond the prejudice and fuse our ideas with that of the other in order to have a better understanding of the other and ourselves.

This work therefore calls on our leaders to always go beyond prejudice in their search for solutions to ethnic conflicts in Nigeria. We recommend that the principle of mutuality and reciprocity founded on dialogue be adopted in our quest for ethnic conflict resolution in Nigeria. Use of guns and other dangerous weapons against each other in Nigeria as a way of resolving ethnic conflicts will continue to fail us. As rational creatures we must go beyond our individual and collective prejudices and adopt this simple but very effective principle of dialogue with a mind focus on the following cardinal points of mutuality and reciprocity in the resolution of ethnic conflicts in Nigeria. Gadamer's fusion of horizons teaches mutual respect, tolerance and dialogue with each other. These are the basic mechanisms we need in order to have a tolerable and peaceful co-existence in Nigeria.