

Ethnic-Nationalism and Politics of Recognition in Africa: Towards a Multicultural Ideology

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Abstract

The African continent has been deeply enmeshed in several cases of inter-ethnic rivalries, ethno-national militarism, and as a consequence, political instability and gruesome conflicts and violent attacks, most of which are triggered by situations of inter-ethnic deprivation, segregation, idiosyncrasies, and the political dominance of one or more ethnic nationalities by a particular or some certain ethnic groups. The crises of Ethnic-Nationalism in several African states have thereby given rise to the politics of ethno-national recognition across the continent, which is also linked to the lingering problem of underdevelopment experienced in most African states. This paper thereby proposes the adoption of multiculturalism as an ideology for cultural diversity, which can be deployed in protecting the various cultural values, socio-political and economic interests of each ethnic-nationality within all African states, thereby promoting and accommodating cultural diversity across the continent. The accommodation of cultural diversity is expected to in turn yield socio-political and economic development as well as foster peaceful inter-ethnic coexistence on the continent.

Keywords: African, crises, ethnic-nationalism, ideology, multiculturalism, underdevelopment.

1. Introduction

Cultural differences or diversity have been present in societies over the years and across centuries. Instances of cultural diversity can be traced as far back as Ancient Greece, where various small regions **with different customs, traditions, dialects and identities,

existed, for example, those from Aetolia, Locris, Doris, and Epirus. Another fascinating instance of this is found in the Ottoman Empire, where Muslims were the majority, but there were also Christians, Jews, Pagan Arabs, and other religious groups.

In the twenty-first century, societies remain culturally diverse, with most countries having a mixture of individuals from different races, linguistic backgrounds, religious affiliations and so forth. Countries like Australia, Northern Ireland, the United States of America and even Nigeria among others, are good instances of culturally diverse societies.

Will Kymlicka, a prominent scholar in the debates on Liberalism and Multiculturalism, makes the following claim: "Most countries are culturally diverse. According to recent estimates, the world's 184 independent states contain over 600 living language groups, and 5,000 ethnic groups. In very few countries can the citizens be said to share the same language, or belong to the same ethno-national group."¹ Contemporary political theorists have labelled this phenomenon of the coexistence of different cultures in the same geographical space, multiculturalism.

Multiculturalism as an ideology advocates for the protection and accommodation of the distinctive interests, values, ideals, customs, and norms of every culture, within a culturally diverse socio-political context. Multiculturalism therefore affirms that the values and interests of each culture should be respected, while economic resources should be equitably distributed amongst diverse cultures. Thus, one of the meanings of multiculturalism is the coexistence of different cultures. However, with the prevalence of social and political unrest resulting from Ethnic-Nationalism in several states across the African continent, it becomes imperative to advocate the adoption of a political and social ideology that will promote cultural diversity and foster peaceful inter-ethnic coexistence within the continent.

The paper adopts the philosophical method of conceptual analysis, and critical evaluation in advancing the thesis of the research, which is that the ideology of multiculturalism is vital in

¹ Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 1.

addressing the prolonged issues of ethnic-nationalism and politics of recognition in African states.

This paper engages in an in-depth analysis of multiculturalism as a political concept and as an Ideology for cultural diversity, while also discussing the crisis of Ethnic-Nationalism and the problem of development across several African states. The paper thereby contends that the adoption of a multicultural political ideology can aid in the achievement of political, economic, and cultural development across the African continent, while promoting peaceful inter-ethnic coexistence on the continent.

2. Ethnic Nationalism and the Problem of Development in Contemporary Africa

The concept of nationalism is being used in various senses due to its conceptual fluidity. David Miller identifies three core elements of nationalism, the first of which is that “nations are real”, that there are some elements that differentiate people belonging one nation from those who belong to others. The second element of nationalism is that membership in a nation “confers rights and imposes obligations”, while the third core element is that nationhood has political significance.² Within the context of this paper, nationalism is being used to infer patriotism, which is the idea of supporting one’s country or ethnic background, people or culture and promoting the interests of one’s nation.

Ethnic nationalism as a concept, can be described as the tendency of an ethnic group to develop aspirations towards a shared national identity, which will develop into a nation-state in modern political context. Ethnic nationalism involves a sense of shared belonging to an ethnic identity, language, religion, values and other similar traits. As such, ethnic nationalism is a form of nationalism that is predicated on ethnic identity and ties.

The African continent is one with experiences of violent inter-ethnic conflicts which have resulted in the deterioration of national security and hindrance of economic development in most African

² David Miller, “Nationalism,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Theory*, eds. John S. Dryzek, Bonnie Honig, Anne Phillips (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 29-30.

states.³ According to the Uppsala Conflict Data Project (UCDP), about 58 major armed conflicts have been recorded across the globe over a 13-year period; covering 1990 to 2002. Among these, ethnic related ones account for 19 armed conflicts in Africa, 5 in America, 17 in Asia, 8 in Europe and 9 in the Middle East.⁴ In recent years, ethnic nationalist conflicts have been the dominant form of mass political violence in Africa, most especially in the form of civil wars, which were mostly triggered by the quest for national autonomy. The trajectory of prolonged and protracted ethno-national violence and political conflicts in Africa can be traced to the mid-1960s. Within this period, several cases of civil wars have been recorded in the following countries: Chad, Burundi, Algeria, Congo-Brazzaville, Cote d'Ivoire, Eritrea, Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Niger Republic, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Africa, the Sudan, Uganda and Zimbabwe.⁵ This statistics indicate that more than any other continent, Africa has fallen victim of violent conflicts, most of which are traceable to inter-ethnic rivalries and clashes.⁶

The gruesome political, economic and socio-cultural impacts of the prevalent Ethno-nationalist crisis and violence can be felt across the continent. They have all contributed to the level of underdevelopment presently witnessed on the continent. Most cases of inter-ethnic rivalries or violence related to ethnic nationalism on the continent can be traced to the partitioning, and somewhat illogical integration of territories that were initially occupied by different ethnic nationalities. Most of these ethnic nationalities possessed highly sophisticated and organized socio-political and economic institutions, and they were partitioned

³ Andreas Wimmer, Richard J. Goldstone, Donald L. Horowitz, *et al.*, *Facing Ethnic Conflicts: Toward a New Realism* (Lanham: Rowmann and Littlefield Publishers, 2004), 1.

⁴ Mikael Eriksson, ed., *States in Armed Conflicts 2002* (Uppsala: Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University, 2003), 45-52.

⁵ Wimmer, Goldstone, Horowitz, *et al.*, *Facing Ethnic Conflicts*, 1.

⁶ Frantz Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1968), 1.

under the umbrella of a single national identity.⁷ An effect of this multi-ethnic fusion is the creation of several institutions and systems with structural imbalances in several African countries. The structural and institutional imbalances created by the colonial authorities in Africa is often regarded as the major cause for the widening disparities in the levels of development witnessed by the various ethnic-nationalities in most countries on the continent. Therefore, structural and institutional imbalances in political, economic, social, cultural and other institutions gave birth to the scarcity of economic resources. This, consequently resulted in the struggle for power, recognition and economic resources amongst ethnic-nationalities in Africa.

A typical instance of the power tussle amongst ethnic-nationalities due to political and economic reasons can be found in Nigeria, a country situated in West Africa, consisting of about 250 tribes and over 120 divergent linguistic communities. The three major ethnic nationalities in the country; the Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa, were fused by the British colonial administration to constitute a single nation. But this political fusion has only degenerated into several cases of inter-ethnic rivalry, ethno-national political dissonance, and antipathies from ethnic groups that feel deprived of an equitable share of economic resources. Political recognition and development within the country, as evident in the establishment of colonial administrative offices in Lagos and Calabar, indicates the distaste of deprived ethnic groups.⁸ The problem of ethnic militarism and ethno-national violence has persisted in the country till the contemporary period. This is evident in the self-determination agitations of the so-called Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), under the leadership of a Biafran nationalist agitator known as Nnamdi Kanu. The IPOB have exerted several violent and destructive confrontations to the Nigerian Federal Government, while also leading to massive

⁷ Claude Ake, *Democracy and Development in Africa* (Ibadan: Spectrum Books Ltd., 1968).

⁸ Ade J.F. Ajayi, "The Problem of National Integration in Nigeria," Distinguished Lecture Series, no. 11, Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research, Ibadan, 1984.

killings and destruction of properties. The same can be said of the Niger Delta militants who are also canvassing for a more equitable share of the national resources in the country due to the deficiencies they suffer, as a result of the massive industrial and commercial extraction of crude oil from their land surfaces and water ways. The country is now nearing a divide as certain ethnic-nationalists are beginning to agitate for separation. For example, a Yoruba national republic or Oodua Republic and the Republic of Biafra.

A similar instance of the inter-ethnic deprivation is traceable to Rwanda, where the Belgian colonialist policies were mostly in favour of the Tutsi minority group, over the Hutus majority. The Hutus ethnic group felt they were deprived of an equitable share of political power in the country, which gave rise to inter-ethnic rivalry and crisis.⁹ The current state of ethno-nationalist crisis in contemporary Africa is mostly evident in the form of opposition to ethnic discrimination, parochialism, and the domination of one or more ethnic nationalities over others on the basis of economic resources and political power.

3. Conceptualising Multiculturalism

The term 'multiculturalism' gained wide currency in both academic and popular debate, and its employment is not restricted to political theory or political science. This explains why the term has not been used only to describe a culturally diverse society, but also to refer to a kind of policy that aims at protecting cultural diversity. Despite its long history, multiculturalism only became prominent as a topic in philosophy in the late twentieth century, when it began to receive special attention, especially from liberal philosophers. It has now become a widespread topic in political philosophy, in the twenty-first century. Before multiculturalism became a topic in political philosophy, most literature in this area focused on topics related to the fair redistribution of resources; conversely, the topic of multiculturalism in the realm of political philosophy highlights the idea that cultural identities are also

⁹ W. Bergmann and R. Crutchfield, "Racial and Ethnic Conflict and Violence," *International Journal of Conflict and Violence* 3, no. 2 (2009), 146-153.

normatively relevant and that policies ought to take identities into consideration.

Multiculturalism emerged in the 1960s as a distinct area of academic debate. The term multiculturalism can mean a political ideology, or a concept referring to the existence of multiple cultures in a social setting. In contemporary political theory, multiculturalism is used in two special ways; (i) as a descriptive concept; and (ii) as a kind of policy for responding to cultural diversity. Multiculturalism is sometimes also used as a term for describing a society where a variety of different cultures coexist. Culture here could equate to a language group, an ethnic group and an ethno-national group. Hence, Will Kymlicka considers culture as an “intergenerational community, more or less institutionally complete, occupying a given state territory, sharing a distinct language and history.”¹⁰ This definition by Kymlicka suggests that there are a variety of ways in which societies can be diverse, and that culture can come in many forms. Some of those ways include; having different religious groups, different linguistic groups, those that distinguish themselves by their territorial identity and even racial differences. Until recently, race (or ethnicity) rather than culture was the concept in debates about citizenship and immigration.

Multiculturalism is an ideology that propagates cultural inclusivity within the context of cultural diversity. Multiculturalism can therefore be properly conceptualised as a practice or policy that propagates giving equal representation to the cultural needs and contributions of all groups in a society. The ideology especially favours minority groups that have not been represented in the past. Persons can be defined as different by a range of characteristics, which include language, bodily features, dress, religion and diet. As such, a legislation or law designed to protect such people cannot easily slot discrimination into a single category, such as racial, or religious, or cultural, or ethnic. In this sense race and culture are inextricably linked.

The concept of culture is central to the idea of multiculturalism. Hence, to have a proper understanding of

¹⁰ Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship*, 8.

multiculturalism, it is pertinent to do a clarification of the meaning of culture. Clifford Geertz, an anthropologist, cites Clyde Kluckhohn to have given the following definitions of culture:

(1) “the total way of life of a people”; (2) “the social legacy the individual acquires from his group”; (3) “a way of thinking, feeling, and believing”; (4) “an abstraction from behavior”; (5) a theory on the part of the anthropologist about the way in which a group of people in fact behave; (6) a “store-house of pooled learning”; (7) “a set of standardized orientations to recurrent problems”; (8) “Learned behavior”; (9) a mechanism for the normative regulation of behavior; (10) “a set of techniques of adjusting both to the external environment and to other men”; (11) “a precipitate of history”; and turning, perhaps in desperation, to similes, as a map, as a sieve, and a matrix.”¹¹

What is common in the above set of definitions, is that culture incorporates the entire habits, values, morals, mores, beliefs, belief-systems, modes of thought, learned behaviours, means of survival, social legacies and history, that are peculiar to and shared by individuals in a community, or a community of individuals, and are constitutive of the individual’s personal identity. A similar description of culture is given by another anthropologist, Edward Tylor, who defined culture as “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.”¹² Based on Tylor’s definition, a culture is something that is artificial, what is created and given by a society of individuals, as against what is naturally inherited.

However, given a shared biological nature and largely similar physical needs that apply to the human race, how can we explain the diversities that occur in the cultures of different groups of people? There are various responses to the question of the factors

¹¹ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* Selected Essays (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers. 1973), 4-5.

¹² Edward Tylor, *Primitive Culture* vol. 1 (New York: J.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1920), 1.

responsible for cultural diversity. These responses can be categorized into the universalist and relativist camps.

In the universalist camp we find these Marxists who argue that 'forms of consciousness' (culture) are to be explained by underlying material forces, and cultural change is derivative of changes in the relations of production. For such Marxists, culture is a secondary phenomenon and not the true 'subject of history'.¹³

But some universalists maintain that culture is basic, that cultural diversity is only explained by different rates of evolution. Some Nineteenth-century anthropologists, including Tylor described their conception of primitive cultures as what obtained in earlier European cultural forms. There are liberal forms of this evolution theory, expressed in John Stuart Mill's position that "human beings have innate rational capacities that can be realized under particular cultural conditions."¹⁴ According to J. Hobbes and P. Graham, "In its early phase, anthropology was dominated by universalist theories, but by the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries it came under sustained attack by relativists, such as Franz Boas, and his students, Ruth Benedict and Alfred Kroeber."¹⁵

Against the universalists, the relativists suggest that culture is an integrated pattern of intelligent, and even sometimes, unconscious behaviour.

It involves an apparently arbitrary selection of ways of being that are reinforced over time: the correlative of such selection is the implicit rejection of other ways of being. There are no underlying non-cultural needs, drives or capacities, nor is a particular culture, following Hegel, an instantiation of a process of cultural change.¹⁶

For these theorists, there can be no cultural diversity within a society, for culture is integral. This mode of cultural relativism is

¹³J. Hobbes, and P. Graham, *Introduction to Political Ideologies* (United Kingdom: Pearson Education Ltd, 2006), 201.

¹⁴ John Mill. *On Liberty in Focus* (New York: Rutledge, 1991), 231.

¹⁵ Hobbes and Graham, *Introduction to Political Ideologies*, 201.

¹⁶ Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship*, 1.

expressed by Geertz, when he writes that culture “is a complex of signs, whose meaning is dependent upon perspective, not in the sense that such understanding – interpretation – must make reference to the context of the participants.”¹⁷

Cultural diversity is a term that captures various strands or elements that constitute diversity in human social relations, which include religious, linguistic, and group diversity. This is due to the fact that culture as it is being used in this work refers to religious, ethnic, linguistic, racial and ethno-national groups. Much of the debate about cultural diversity is really about the relationship of religion and politics that is, of the consequences or implications of the existence of conflicting belief systems, including secular ones, within a political territory. Religious diversity is a common phenomenon in many countries in the world today. In Nigeria for example, there are three basic religions, namely: Islam, Christianity, and the Traditional religions. The traditional religions are constituted of thousands of distinct belief systems and modes of worship. In India as well, there are citizens who are Sikhs, Hindus, Buddhists, among other religious groups. Linguistic diversity is also common in most countries. There are thousands of spoken languages across the world. Linguistic diversity is also a consequence of two major factors. First, it is usually as a result of immigrants moving into a country where the language spoken is not their native language or is strange to them. The second factor is as a result of groups or national minorities that have either settled in a country for a long period of time, but do not share the same language with the majority. In most cases, such minority groups are territorially concentrated; they usually demand for a high degree of autonomy and in some cases, agitate for regional power to run their territory independently. Group diversity can also result from territory location or geographical boundaries. The fact that such groups are distinguished by territory location does not mean that they have different habits, traditions, customs, morals and norms from other groups. However, these distinct groups only emphasize their specific geographical location and see reasons why they should identify themselves as different from

¹⁷ Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 4-5.

others based on their geographical location. Race and ethnicity is also a kind of group diversity, which are concerned with somatic, or phenotypical differences between people: that is, how other people look or sound, or any other way in which they are perceived to be different. Races are groups whose physical characteristics have social significance. Physical characteristics are socially significant because individuals do give importance to such characteristics they consider to stand out in a person's physical appearance, such as skin colour, eye colour, hair colour, bone/jaw structures and sometimes height.

It is important to note that physical characteristics only create a multicultural environment or significance when groups strongly emphasise such physical characteristics and usually define themselves by such attributes. This implies that racial or cultural diversity is not simply the existence of different physical characteristics, but that such characteristics must involve a sense of common identity among members of the group. Such physical attributes or features must be seen as significant factors that differentiate members of a group from others.

Most of the time, groups are not identified by being linguistically different, territorially concentrated, religiously distinct or racially different, as most groups are observed to share more than at least one of these characteristics. For example, the Igbo Tribe of South-eastern part of Nigeria not only occupy a distinct geographical location but also speak a different language, which is the Igbo language. The implication of this for our discussion is that each group is not necessarily defined by a particular characteristic as groups. Sometimes, there is a combination of characteristics that define a group.

4. Multiculturalism as a Policy for Cultural Diversity

Multiculturalism is also understood as a kind of policy that aims at addressing the different demands of cultural groups. There are certain different normative challenges or difficulties faced by cultural groups that arise from cultural diversity. For instance, ethnic conflict, internal illiberalism, federal autonomy, and so on.

Multiculturalism therefore, aims at addressing such normative challenges faced by cultural groups. What multicultural policies do is to correct the disadvantages that individuals face, and the problems that result from individuals' cultural identity. In the case of a religious dress ban, for instance in some parts of Nigeria where Muslim girls are restricted from wearing *hijab* to schools, Muslims are most likely to be disadvantaged and thus, need policies to protect their identity.

Multicultural policies also aim at providing groups with the means by which individuals can pursue their cultural differences. They have the objective of preserving and celebrating group differences, and as such, stand in contrast to policies of assimilation. Multiculturalism acknowledges that people have different ways of life or different cultures, therefore, it provides tools for such people to pursue their own ways of life or culture.

In contemporary political theory, discussions on multiculturalism have been centred on the type of policies required to protect minority groups. This implies, assessing to what extent it is just to give rights to groups so that they can pursue their cultural differences. Also of interest, especially to contemporary liberal political theorists are the kinds of inequalities that exist between majorities and minorities, and how to address such inequalities.

Liberal multiculturalists seem to be at tussle with non-liberal multiculturalists over the reasons why group rights or recognition should be acknowledged. For liberal multi-culturalists, respect for cultural groups should be viewed in instrumental terms.¹⁸ They argue that cultural groups are respected because doing so helps secure the liberal goal of individual autonomy. This argument draws its influence from John Rawls who argued in his *Theory of Justice* that self-respect is a primary good. On Rawls' account, liberal states ought to secure the social basis of self-respect for their members. Based on Rawls' argument, liberal multiculturalists argue that people's self-respect is bound up with the respect in which their cultural group is held. The argument is that if a culture lacks general respect, then its members will lose their dignity and

¹⁸ J. Dryzek, B. Honig and A. Phillips, (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Political Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). 547.

self-respect. A person who lacks self-respect will not feel confident about actualizing his/her plans and projects.

Another argument by liberal multiculturalists is that people need culture or what is called a “cultural structure” for them to make meaningful decisions. According to J. Raz, it is “only by being socialized into a culture can one tap the options which give shape and content to individual freedom.”¹⁹ A dying culture is believed to undermine the self-respect of its members and their ability to make choices, as such, the culture needs active state support for it to continue to exist. Most of the time, liberal multiculturalists agitate for minority group rights, since majority culture often receives enough implicit and explicit cultural support from the state.

Non-liberals, on the other hand, argue that cultures deserve respect because they are intrinsically valuable. For them, the liberal instrumental argument for cultural rights will too readily withhold respect from cultures that deserve it. Therefore, they consider liberal multiculturalism to be narrow as it does not give enough support to non-liberal cultures. Non-liberal multiculturalists support the intrinsic worth of culture. The point of this argument is that cultures are worthy of respect not because they enable some other good, like individual autonomy, but because cultures are valuable in, and of themselves. Cultures are human creations or inventions, and since people’s identities are interwoven within their cultures, cultures are intrinsically worthy of respect. People deserve respect, thus, we ought to respect culture because the identity of people are imbued in the culture to which they belong. Whether a particular culture is liberal or not, it ought to be respected because the presence of cultures enriches us and provides us with a basis for reflection on beliefs and practices.

Another issue of contention amongst contemporary liberal political philosophers has been how the state should respond to group differences, or what the state should do about group inequalities. On the one hand, some liberal political theorists contend that the state should be blind to group differences and

¹⁹J. Raz, *Ethics in the Public Domain: Essays in the Morality of Law and Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994). 178.

that individuals should be given a uniform set of rights and liberties. They claim that ascribing rights on the basis of membership in a group is a discriminatory and immoral policy that creates citizenship hierarchies.²⁰ Therefore, the state should not be involved in the cultural character of society. On the other hand, some philosophers, most of whom are liberal multiculturalists like Kymlicka argue that the state should be involved in ascribing rights to groups, and should implement difference-sensitive policies. Their argument is that difference-sensitive policies help to correct intergroup inequalities.

5. Proponents of Multicultural Citizenship

Proponents of multicultural citizenship, like, Charles Taylor, Will Kymlicka, Jacob S. Hacker and others claim that the state has the duty to support laws which defend the basic legal, civil and political rights of its citizens. They also hold that the state should participate in the construction of societal cultural character, thus, its laws and policies should aim at protecting culture. For them, culture has a normative character, and the interests of individuals in culture are sufficiently strong to be supported by the state. They also defend difference-sensitive or multicultural citizenship policies for protecting culture.

Kymlicka adopts the liberal view that group rights are compatible with and promote the liberal value of freedom and equality. Therefore, he argues that the state should endeavour to protect the culture of a group so as to enhance individual autonomy. For him, societal cultures promote freedom, and are important because they give individuals the groundwork from which they can make choices. For Kymlicka, societal cultures provide a framework with meaningful ways of life, and also societal conditions that are necessary for individuals to make autonomous choices. This therefore establishes the grounds for the protection of societal cultures. According to Taylor, public

²⁰ W. Kymlicka, "Liberal Complacencies," in *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?* eds. J. Cohen, M. Howard and M. Nussbaum (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 112-113.

recognition is of utmost importance. He explains that public recognition has to do with respect and esteem for one's identity in the public realm. Therefore, if a person's culture is given recognition, then such a person's identity is also protected. On the contrary being misrecognised in the public sphere means to have one's identity disrespected. It could mean to have an unequal citizenship status, or having a legal disadvantage resulting from one's identity. According to Taylor, misrecognition can be in the form of oppression and therefore may be a serious effect on individuals. In Taylor's words, misrecognition can "inflict a grievous wound, saddling its victims with a crippling self-hatred."²¹ Taylor discusses the idea of procedural and non-procedural liberalism, and conceives procedural liberalism as being inhospitable to difference and unable to accommodate different cultures, as it advocates uniformity in group rights. In Taylor's view, a non-procedural form of liberalism should be endorsed as it enhances cultural diversity and is hospitable to group differences. This non-procedural form of liberalism takes into account differences between individuals and groups thereby creating an environment that enables the flourishing of different cultures. Another prominent exponent of multiculturalism is Jacob Hacker, who advocates a form of joint governance model, or transformative accommodation. This is the view that legal decisions would result from an interdependent and cooperative relationship between the group and the state.

6. Multiculturalism and its Critics

The liberal argument for multiculturalism that upholds that people need to be situated within a secure culture to live an autonomous life has been opposed by some critics, like Ganesh Nathan, Jeremy Waldron, Seyla Benhabib and the rest. They opine that since some cultures will be secure even if others are not, why then should we argue for state support for any culture? For them, if a culture is dying, the solution may not be to buttress the vanishing culture,

²¹ Charles Taylor, "Politics of Recognition," in *Multiculturalism, Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed., Amy Gutmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 26.

but to help its members join a different one, which may even be more vibrant. There are historical instances of people who changed cultures, or lived between or among two or more cultures, such as the African-Americans, Hispanics or Latinos, Indian-Americans and a plethora of others. For a critique like Nathan, essentialist notions of culture should be disregarded, since cultures are not essentially distinct and self-contained wholes. Nathan contends that while the argument for cultural support is often placed under the umbrella of liberal ideals, many cultures are not liberal, this leads to a contradiction in some versions of liberal multiculturalism.²² The contradiction is that while liberal multiculturalism advocates for the freedom of members of each diverse culture to fully express their values and belief-systems, some cultures restrict their members from exercising their freedom.

However, both liberal and non-liberal multiculturalism have been criticised for attempting to freeze the boundaries around cultural groups and nominating some of them for special treatment. Given that people are often members of several groups, the question now is, which one should then be respected?

There are those critics who argue that cultures do not have clear boundaries, that there is a way cultures “meld and mesh with one another.”²³ For instance, Benhabib avers that cultures are also internally driven and contested,²⁴ and Jeremy Waldron insists that people do need cultural meanings, but this does not mean that they necessarily have to live within a single culture or cultural framework. Generally, our cultures are a mix of many different elements taken freely from one another. Waldron expresses that in this particular globalised world, “we draw our allegiances from here, there and everywhere. Bits of cultures come into our lives from different sources.”²⁵ He further posits that culture is not a thing that can be artificially preserved, just like the cultural right

²² G. Nathan, “A Critique of Liberal Multiculturalism,” in *Social Freedom in a Multicultural State* Palgrave Politics of Identity and Citizenship Series, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

²³ Dryzek, Honig and Phillips, *The Oxford Handbook*, 553.

²⁴ S. Benhabib, *The Claims of Culture: Equality and Diversity in the Global Era* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 16.

²⁵ Jeremy Waldron, “Superseding Historic Injustice,” *Ethics* 103, no. 1 (1992), 16.

arguments propose. “Cultures live and grow, change, and sometimes wither away; they amalgamate with other cultures... To preserve a culture is often to take a favoured snapshot version of it and insist that this version must persist at all costs.”²⁶ These critics attack multiculturalists for thinking that we have attachments to specific cultures that can readily be identified and preserved. We are currently in a globalised world where people have myriad cultural attachments, and cultural boundaries themselves are fluid.

Another criticism against multiculturalism comes from liberals who believe that the traditional liberal solutions should be enough to satisfy multicultural needs or are sufficient to preserve group rights. “They suggest that the liberal model of religion and state can be followed with ethno-cultural groups: just as the state should not favour one religion over another, but simply disentangle itself from culture and identity.”²⁷ They are also of the view that the liberal ideal of equality can also be of importance in this context. That is, if we want to correct the injustices of the past, or treat equally members that were previously invisible in the public sphere, we do not need a new fancy theory of multiculturalism. What we need is simply to apply the idea of equality in new contexts.

7. Multiculturalism as an Ideology for Ethno-political Integration and Development in Africa

National sentiments sometimes urge a certain consideration for the demands of groups. The principle of nationality itself is sympathetic to the interests and claims or demands of groups and also to their demand for the protection of their integrity, but by definition, nationality must be wary of group claims that might result in the undermining of national identity. This issue is raised particularly when nationalism runs counter to the question of multiculturalism. Multiculturalism is inconsistent with any form of nationalism to the extent to which it promotes or advocates the

²⁶ Waldron, “Superseding Historic Injustice,” 109-10.

²⁷ A. Barry, *Political Machines: Governing a Technological Society* (London: The Athlone Press, 2001), 65.

accommodation of a plurality of identities holding to divergent values within a state.

In another sense, multiculturalism can be taken to be a theory of nationalism per-excellence. Nationalism has been conceived to imply non-separation, but only a measure of independence. In this sense, one could make an attempt to reconcile multiculturalism with nationalism, just like some other theorists who uphold the principle of nationality without having to jettison cultural diversity and the toleration of difference. A theorist who has made contributions in this respect is David Miller, who claims that nations have good reasons for wanting to be self-determining, and that we can recognize the claims of nationality without suppressing other sources of identity, such as ethnicity.²⁸ he argues that nationalism is important since it is a precondition for social justice. The pursuit of social justice requires that a measure of social solidarity is necessary if citizens are to go along with institutions which perform a redistributive function. In this sense, the state owes the citizens some level of respect and recognition.

The desire for each group to be recognised as different and distinctive, gives rise to a demand for a politics of multiculturalism, one that recognises and tolerates or even encourages and honours diversity. This politics of diversity in turn may lead to a demand for political separation, just like it is experienced in Nigeria with the South-eastern (Biafra) part of the country agitating for self-determination or separation. This will lead to the emergence of communities in which diversity has no place. Then, the ideal of nationalism and unity in diversity will be deflated. A close approximate to the practice of multiculturalism can be found in contemporary United States of America, where racial, cultural, ethnic, national, sexual, and even gender diversities are accommodated and celebrated. African countries such as Chad, Burundi, Algeria, Congo-Brazzaville, Cote d'Ivoire, Eritrea, Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Guinea-Bissau,

²⁸ David Miller, "Multiculturalism and the Welfare State: Theoretical Reflections," in *Multiculturalism and the Welfare State: Recognition and Redistribution in Contemporary Democracies* ed., Keith Banting and Will Kymlicka, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 323-338.

Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Niger Republic, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Africa, the Sudan, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Libya, Niger Republic and Angola should thereby adopt an Ideology that will facilitate the recognition and consideration of various ethnic-nationalities in the equitable distribution of economic resources and political power.²⁹ All African states should thereby embrace and accommodate ethno-cultural diversity by protecting the cultural values, norms, and customs of each ethnic-nationality, while also Implementing cultural diversity in the structuring and configuration of social, political, economic and cultural institutions on the continent.

Descriptively, Nigeria, which is the most populous state in Africa, is a multicultural society, but not so ideologically. Nigeria is composed of multiple ethnic groups and cultures and even the term Nigerian refers to citizenship-based civic nationality, due to the fact that to be identified as a Nigerian is to be a citizen of the country. Statistically, there are about 250 ethnic groups and languages. Aside from the three major ethnic groups: Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba, there are hundreds of minority ethnic groups and language-groups in the country. Given the economic factors in the country, multiple ethnic groups are forced to move from their bases to territories that are outside their ethnic or religious background, which results in the intermixing of various ethnic and religious groups.

As a matter of fact, the 1967 civil war in Nigeria that lasted for 30 months is as a result of ethnic rivalry. Those from the Eastern part of the country, popularly known as the Igbo where agitating for self-rule, or secession from the Nigerian Federal Government. They saw themselves as a united group and took the name 'Biafra' for their new country. The major reason for their agitations was born out of their feelings of oppression, disadvantage, marginalization, or neglect by the Federal Government. Till the present day, there are still protests and demonstrations all over the country by ethno-national groups like the Yoruba and Igbo who feel that they are not given proper recognition and want their voices to be heard. The Biafra saga is not dead yet, various groups,

²⁹ Wimmer, Goldstone, Horowitz, *et al.*, *Facing Ethnic Conflicts*, 1.

including the IPOB emerge almost on daily basis to clamour for the sovereignty of the Biafra nation, thereby posing threats to life and property in the region.

In a socio-political context where there are different cultural groups co-existing, conflict is an imperative natural phenomenon. Each distinct group always wants to be recognized, and also considered in terms of the distribution of resources. At any point, a group could feel alienated or side-lined from enjoying the privileges enjoyed by other groups, thereby resulting in ethnic rivalry or crisis. The way out of this social ethno-national crisis and violence for a country like Nigeria is to adopt and implement multicultural citizenship policies that will protect the identities and autonomy of members of various groups. Nigeria should also consider sensitive policies aimed at fostering the political, economic, social, and cultural interests of the respective ethnic-nationalities in the country. Multiculturalism as an ideology, would address the integration of Nigeria's (as well as African) cultural diversity, enable political stability and ensure the peaceful co-existence of ethnic groups in African states.³⁰

8. Conclusion

The concept of multiculturalism is either used in a descriptive sense, or conceived as an ideology for cultural diversity. Multiculturalism is a 21st century ideology that champions group recognition and respect or that certain rights should be accorded to groups based on various reasons. In this paper, we have done an exposition of the concept of multiculturalism, while discussing the central role of culture in debates on multiculturalism. The views of the major proponents of multicultural citizenship have also been discussed, as well as the major arguments levelled against the ideology. The various roles multiculturalism as an ideology for cultural diversity, political stability and peaceful co-existence can play in a multi-ethnic socio-political context like Nigeria and Africa at large have also been identified and elaborated in this paper. In

³⁰Claude Ake, Claude, *Democracy and Development in Africa* (Ibadan: Spectrum Books Ltd., 2001).

its role as an ideology that advocates state policies that protect cultural interests and values, the multicultural ideology can aid African states as a whole in addressing the problems of inter-ethnic rivalries, deprivation, segregation, and ethno-national militarism, by ensuring the protection of the economic, social, political and cultural interests and aspirations of each ethnic-nationality. This affirmation is made, due to the fact that multiculturalism is an ideology that essential protects cultural diversity, and the concept of cultural diversity captures various elements that differentiate groups of people, such as race, culture, religion, language, ethnicity and so on.