

INTERCULTURALITY: SOLUTION TO THE DILEMMA OF ETHNOCENTRIC MINDSET IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Nigeria is an ethnically varied society, the beauty in Nigeria diversity seems not to be maximally positioned for appreciation because, the ethnocentric mindset is the order of the day. Instead enjoying the diversifying cultures and ethnic groups as sources of ethnic colouration and strength, it is rather misrepresented with a mindset that sees a particular ethnic group as more important and superior to others. While culture is the consummate world view of a society, ethnicity is centered mostly on shared ancestry or lineage amongst other things. Thus, even amongst culturally relative groups, ethnicity often plays out as tool for conflict amongst them. This conflict is not some simple disagreement on opinions but complex matters of superior/inferior and majority/minority appropriations of liberal and social matters. The rising trend of interculturality, if applied as a prescriptive tool, may restore unity to our society while also maintaining the identity that is important to each group. It is therefore, the position of this paper that, interculturality carries a new order for human interactions that is capable of unifying seemingly divergent groups and orientations. Seeing that, the adverse effect of ethnicity has become a threat to our corporate existence as a country, every scholarly attention it is receiving is worth it, until a sustainable solution is reached. Using the conversationalist method, this paper argues that interculturality bears the solution to the problem of ethnocentrism and mindset of seeing a culture as superior and self-sufficient in Nigeria. Through it, the need for interaction is promoted and the differences in cultures and the ethnic groups is seen as a point of learning and improvement to the society and not as a point of disunity and war.

Key Words: Ethnicity, Interculturality, Universalist, Nigeria, Culture, Unity.

Introduction

The position of this research is that, ethnocentric mindset is among the chief factors that continue to pull the nation Nigeria back in her journey to achieving unity. We point to ethnocentric mindset as leader amongst other factors such as religion because, while most religions primarily preach peace and love for one's creator and one's Neighbor, this imposing ethnocentric mindset seems to tow the path of indoctrination. In most cases, the problem of ethnocentrism results in division and brings about tribal sentiments rather than equality and competence. Often times in our interaction and living, people can easily tolerate doctrines and teachings of religion even in employment but, rarely ever tolerate or accommodate ethnic difference in employing or accommodating one who is not of same ethnic background, due to ethnocentric bias. Where questions are not asked for clarity, people only move blindly. This is the reason we consider ethnocentric indoctrinations dangerous and chief of the factors

causing the gradual decline and disintegration of the bonds that bind the various ethnic groups in Nigeria.

At first, ethnicity appears to be a tool employed by some to gain certain political or economic gratification, thereby suggesting that the application or relevance of ethnocentric mindset is not situated with the masses but with a few elites and as such a farce. U. Ukiwo (2005) noted of R. L. Sklar that, the 1960's and 1970's intellectual traditions felt that ethnicity was of secondary importance as an explanatory variable; at best an epiphenomenon and at worst a mask for class privilege. But, in today's reality, we find that even the masses engage in tribal discrimination and ethnic bias. When we look at the relationship between ethnic groups in Nigeria, I can confirm that those relationships are barely tolerant. Hence, Isaiah Negedu and S. Ojamah (2021.667), clearly aver that "culture as a very important attribute of man necessarily needs synergy in the globalized world to increase effectiveness in a universe that necessarily has to embrace advancement..." contrary to this stance, ethnocentric mindset and disregard for other cultures results in cultural imperialism and dominance over others, thereby halting advancement in technology, growth and all. Since individual dispositions and actions are often based on cultural values/worldview, an ethnocentric mindset ensures that at points of cultural differences, individuals hold on to their ideals, even to the point of intolerance. Klaus Desmet et al (2017) states:

In poor countries, often characterized by a high level of ethnic diversity, concerns arise that groups with heterogeneous values, norms, and attitudes—the broad set of traits that we will refer to as "culture"—may be unable to agree on policies, the provision of public goods, and the broader goals of society. In rich countries, debates rage over multiculturalism and whether population movements brought about by globalization and modernity will result in cultural divisions and the breakdown of social consensus. Underlying these debates is an assumption that people agree within groups and disagree across groups, so that cultural heterogeneity and ethnic heterogeneity are two sides of the same coin.

So, even among individuals from a similar cultural background, conflicts still arise along ethnic divides. In most cases, intra-ethnic divide is taken for granted, with scholars paying more attention to inter-ethnic divide. According to U. Ukiwo (2005) who shares this view, analysts have paid more attention to inter-ethnic than intra-ethnic conflicts because the cohesion of ethnic groups is often taken for granted. According to Klaus. Desmet et al.(2015), if most of cultural heterogeneity occurs within groups rather than between groups, then the correlation between ethnic diversity and cultural diversity will tend to be low. It implies that cultural differences would be well appreciated if it is shared not only within people of same culture or groups but also between people of separate culture to help teach those who do not have such differences in their culture. By doing this cross cultural values between and among different ethnic groups helps to display the richness of each ethnic groups without losing their values to any. This is the aim of using intercultural philosophy to tackle the problem of ethnocentric mindset in a multi-ethnic country like Nigeria.

The aim of this research therefore, is to use conversational thinking of Jonathan Chimakonam to explain how different ethnic groups can interrelate without losing their values as a group. According to Isaiah Ngedu et al (2021. p.8), “conversational thinking purveys a strategy for the interrelationship of different identities. This will in fact encourage intercultural philosophy.” Thus, with conversational thinking, where all ethnic and cultural groups are given fair opportunities to exhibit their cultural values without marginalization, the mindset of the people is developed to embrace interculturality as that best approach that fosters not only inter-cultural strength but also intra-cultural strength that exists in the differences that arises in our different cultures and ethnic group. Interculturality shows that we are same humans in spite of our different ethnic groups. The purpose of the different culture should not be seen as inferiority or weakness instead, interculturality makes everyone to see all cultures as important and a different approach to epistemic life from such culture. By doing this, ethnocentric mindset is abused and mutual existence of different ethnic variations is understood as necessary.

Finally, this work elucidates the dynamics of ethnic groups and bridges the complexity ethnocentric bias can create in Nigeria. It avers that ethnocentric mindset is a problem that has failed to realize that no ethnic group is superior to the other and no ethnic group is self-sufficient. Every ethnic group is an opportunity for epistemic background because new ideas are learnt but where ethnocentrism is encouraged, no new knowledge is gained. With ethnocentric mindset, no new thing can be learnt and thereby making humanity static. Also conversational thinking was employed because it is one method that creates opportunity for variables and contraries to co-exist without any imposing itself on the other. This work argues too that Interculturality is a useful tool in militating against the negative effects of ethnic dominance of one culture over another culture in Nigeria because it concludes that respect for other culture aside ones’ culture promotes unity in diversity, open mind to every culture, societal strength and a bonded country instead of ethnocentric mindset to reality.

Dynamics of Interculturality

Interculturality appears to be gaining more attention by scholars and nationalists across the globe because of its unifying and peace enhancing nature. However, the concept is not exactly new or recent as some may think, according to Pieterse as noted by F. Dervin (2016), the idea of Interculturality has been with us since the beginning of time. People have always interacted across borders, whether national, regional, linguistic, religious, and/ or social. The nature of that interaction as we have also seen over the years have also been problematic thus the need for scholarly debates and appropriations of the concept of interculturality. Consequently, there has been several definition, description and interpretation of the concept, mostly similar except in its application. This perhaps, is the reason why Blommaert (2005) says of interculturality that, it is a travelling discourse. He says that, whenever discourses travel across the globe, what is carried with them is their shape, but their value, meaning, or function do not often travel along’. This implies that in intercultural dialogue, cross-cultural ideas are presented in intercultural dialogues. This is often a critique of interculturality but we shall return to it later on.

As an indicator of the nature of relationships amongst people of diverse ethnicity and also, as a tool to encourage harmony amongst ethnically and culturally diverse people, interculturality can be described and applied in two ways. According to Gunther Dietz (2018),

interculturality is defined and classified in anthropological and social science literature according to three different but complementary semantical axes: (1) the distinction between interculturality as a descriptive rather than a prescriptive concept; (2) the underlying, implicit assumption of a static versus dynamic notion of culture; and (3) the rather functionalist application of the concept of interculturality for analyzing the status quo of a given society versus its critical and emancipatory application for identifying inherent conflicts and sources of societal transformation.

The first and second axes cuts it for this research, they look at the normative meaning and use of the concept and a functionalist application respectively. In the normative sense, interculturality as seen in several works can be approached descriptively or prescriptively. For Dietz (2018);

When it is used as a descriptive and analytical tool, interculturality is defined as the ensemble of interrelations that structure a given society in terms of culture, ethnicity, language, religious denomination, and/or nationality, an ensemble that is perceived through the articulation of different “us” versus “them” groups that interact in often changing majority–minority constellations.

In this sense, interculturality defines the relation that should exists between cultures where each has what it contributes to each culture without subjugating any culture as inferior. It refutes or negates diversity amongst members of society or across societies on different basis including race, religion, ethnicity etc. In a descriptive sense, interculturality acknowledges the differences that exist in the different cultures as well as the prevailing relationship amongst groups which appears in the culture. It does not aim discriminating but the contribution each culture can offer. The prescriptive meaning of the concept on the other hand, places emphasis on the value and use of the concept in society. According to Gundara (2000) as cited in Dietz, interculturality is sometimes coined as interculturalism a transformative program aimed at making contemporary societies more conscious about their internal diversities and more inclusive and symmetrical with regard to their so-called minorities. In a prescriptive sense, interculturality evokes a sense of harmony in the relationships amongst diverse groups. In this sense, interculturality is more practical in its use. It is practical in the sense that, it promotes the capacity to embrace all and sundry irrespective of ethnic, religious or cultural divide. The result of a study carried out by Brien. K. Ashdown et al. on the relationship between two ethnic groups in Guatemala proves that an application of the concept yields a more positive result. According Brien K. Ashdown et al (2015:77);

In several studies both adolescents and emerging adults held more favorable attitudes toward their own ethnic group. Statistical analysis revealed in-group favoritism among Ladino and Indigenous people... However, those with an intercultural identification were unique. Their attitudes toward the two ethnic groups fell in-between...

Thus, interculturality engendered the tempering of peoples' attitudes toward both groups in the quote above.

The functionalist concept of interculturality as it appears in Dietz work, stems from a broader interpretation of the concept with regard to its descriptive and prescriptive connotation. In this context, the definition of interculturality aligns itself with either of the normative definition of the concept. According to Dietz (2018), Interculturality in the functionalist interpretation is viewed as a programmatic, political–educational strategy for smoothing over, softening, or mitigating relations and, on the other hand, a view of interculturality as a transformative strategy to unveil, question, and change historically rooted inequalities within society. The first view of the concept as a political-educational strategy seems to be the reality in most societies, Nigeria inclusive, and it fits in the descriptive understanding of interculturality. The second functionalist interpretation which appears more radical suggests that, interculturality should be approached with the philosophical rigor of scrutinizing societal systems and events for the purpose of finding answers and solutions. In the words of Dietz (2018:3),

In the first case, intercultural competences are defined as functional tools and resources for increasing tolerance for, mutual understanding with, and empathy with others, whereas in the second case these intercultural capacities are interpreted and/or acquired in terms of anti-discrimination, consciousness raising, and dealing with conflict.

Working with the prescriptive functionalist interpretation of interculturality, it can be said that interculturality promotes a people's ability to relate with those outside the ethnic, cultural or religious divide with respect and hospitality.

Complexity of Ethnocentrism in Nigeria

To say that Nigeria is one of the worlds's most ethnically diverse countries would not be an exaggeration at all. According to *Encyclopedia Nigeriana* (2016), Nigeria is a very ethnically diverse state with over 370 ethnic groups. There have been discussions on the meaning of ethnicity and what elements mark the concept, is it culture, language or ancestral identification? Agreeing with Nwadior and Uzoigwe (2014), ethnicity often involves assigning importance to perceived affinities among individuals and some sense of differences among groups. It has been noted in several research that intolerance, discrimination causes unrest and violence on the basis of ethnicity. Also, ethnocentrism begets hatred against other ethnic group and kicks against otherness in cultural co-existence.

For a country such as Nigeria, all the afore mentioned factors; and more have at different points resulted into national crisis. For instance, the Nigerian civil war of 1967 to 1970 and more recently, the insurgency attack in the northern part of Nigeria. Both crises have been based on ethnic marginalization, the superiorisation of one group over the other, the agitation for recognition etc. Little wonder K. L. Nwadior and A. M. Uzoigwe (2012), opine that, Nigeria's experience of ethnic and communal violence has caused many lives to be lost and many individuals to be internally displaced and their properties destroyed. The issue of ethnic intolerance in Nigeria is further elevated by political and economic power distribution. This is more so in Nigeria, due to the current security crisis across the country and the response of government at every point. Let us consider the IPOB agitation for instance, it is common knowledge that a particular ethnic group is fighting for independence (the Igbos). The case of herdsmen or Boko Haram in the Northern part of Nigeria is clear show of intolerance and violence caused by those who are ethnocentric and feel their culture must be superior if not the only culture to exist in Nigeria.

According to a special report by Abubakar Shekau (2013), for the *United States Institute of Peace*, "Boko Haram is an Islamic sect that believes politics in northern Nigeria has been seized by a group of corrupt false Muslims." This group of people leading this group are those who have ethnocentric mindset against other cultures. They wage war against other culture and perhaps religion, and the federal republic of Nigeria generally, to create a "pure" Islamic state ruled by Sharia law. Boko Haram sect is a group that is commonly known to be intolerant to any culture or group that fails to be patient with any belief outside it. The IPOB's on the other hand is believed to be an Igbo separationist agitation group that feels the Igbos should be given independence due to marginalization they have suffered by other cultures in Nigeria. Both groups have in recent years engaged in violence of different sorts in the bid to push their agenda on separation rather than mutual co-existence amidst the differences in thoughts and values.

The ethnic diversity in Nigeria has become more toxic than pleasant. When we look closer at how woven or interwoven some ethnicities are, in terms of similarities of cultural practices, religion etc., we will agree that clashes amongst such groups bother not on identity and the need for recognition but on need to be rated as better or superior over other ethnic group. This feeling is the basis and strength of ethnocentric mindset. Hence, instead of respect and acceptance by all as necessary for peaceful growth, there is always a divide and fight for superiority. The level which Nigeria has gotten to, due to ethnocentric mindset, hatred and intolerance requires an open mind that is free and accommodating of other cultures because, asides political and economic clashes, some families in Nigeria at not at peace with some other members of their family because of their marriage to a particular ethnic group they consider inferior or less important. As a matter of speaking, ethnocentric mindset has made some people to see marrying from certain ethnic group as taboo because they are biased. As E. Erhagbe (2012), rightly noted, The Nigerian state has often been compelled to deal with the issue of national integration, especially in moments of intense ethnic disagreements which have sometimes degenerated into violent conflicts.

The Possibility of Inter-ethnic Unity through Interculturality

There is an urgent need to restore peace and balance to the Nigerian society before the situation deteriorates any further. As stated earlier, an overhauling is now mandatory, an approach to cut across all aspects of society is requisite. It is not impossible to achieve peace, recognition and acceptance in an ethnically diverse society. As a matter of fact, it is achievable if we desire it enough to give what it requires which is respect. To respect or appreciate anything will require some level of knowledge of such thing, and this knowledge will come through the patience to observe, inquire, understand and appreciate the object of our respect. This whole process is what is contained in interculturality. With the right approach, interculturality can become the essential tool that will transform the minds and attitudes of many Nigerians towards those of a different ethnic group from them.

Having seen the dynamic need for mutuality between and among cultures as argued using interculturality in spite of ethnic variance, this research draws upon its prescriptive use to establish our position that no culture is self-sufficient that it cannot learn from other cultures where there is a difference in such cultures. Our position is that, inculcating the value and use sense of the meaning of interculturality can help reorientate the minds of individuals towards accepting and co-existing peacefully with other non-ethnic members of our society. As a matter of fact, we are optimistic that, interculturality in its prescriptive meaning can make ethnic identity a matter of objective inclination to which other inclinations are permissible and intelligible as well. It is important to note at this point that, our notion and application of interculturality is not to suggest that personal or group identity be thrown out the window, rather, our position is that we co-exist in unity knowing that, that which seems like a difference in our cultures is where lies our strength of new knowledge and the colouration of varying ethnic heritage. Through interculturality, many cultures can live together without superiority struggle and without forcing integration for oneness as a culture. Having said that, let us look at the ways through which intercultural knowledge can be spread in a country like Nigeria. The idea is to close the gaps amongst 'privileged' and 'less privileged' ethnic groups. As Dietz (2018) notes of interculturality it;

emphasizes changes in the nature of the relations between these groups, which implies not only empowering certain groups but also altering majority perceptions and promoting reciprocal processes of identification between groups that have been historically privileged and groups that have been historically excluded.

To achieve this, we suggest the approach of intercultural education and competence. Using education and political will or goodwill as tools to promote intercultural relationships is something we believe will bring about tremendous changes that we would love to see. It is therefore not enough, to teach about the Nigerian's people and culture and leave it at that, we should teach also, the importance and value of intercultural relationships in enabling a unified and peaceful co-existence.

Politics and Political Involvements

The political setting and system of a society is like the engine that drives such society, therefore, politics and political leaders in Nigeria have important roles to play to see to the end of ethnic violence across the country. There are several factors in politics that directly affect the ethnic relations among ethnic groups in Nigeria. The way the politics is played captures everything that is wrong or right about the society. According to Büschges (2015), the reference to ethnic differences between human groups has become a common starting point for political debate. The justification of political viewpoints, actors and practices using ethnic arguments has led to lasting changes in the political sphere. It is obvious that, politics and ethnicity are entangled further suggesting the relevance of politics and political involvement in tackling the challenges of ethnicity in Nigeria.

The Zoning of important government offices is a reflection of the density of ethnicity in Nigeria and it is meant to help reduce the tensions of ethnic discrimination in politics. However, it seems to further pronounce our ethnic differences in negative ways. Over the years, we have seen political leaders overly favoring their ethnic group to the point of almost neglecting others completely. There has to be a political will on the part of the leaders to change this pattern for the sake of national interest and peace. As Belinda Archibong (2018) noted, horizontal inequality by ethnic group has remained remarkably persistent for wealth, education and access to certain public services in Nigeria. Therefore, we need the political will of leaders across different ethnic groups to bridge the gaps of wealth and social service distribution across the country.

Thinking the problems of Ethnocentric Mind-set through Interculturality

This part treats the possibility of interculturality as a suitable method in tackling the problem of intolerance, violence caused by ethnocentrism and its mindset that everything on culture must be viewed from one culture or ethnic group. This part argues that with interculturality, everyone understands that different cultures and ethnic groups is not a representation of less humans or people but a presentation of a people with different standpoint to viewing reality they are faced with using divergent cultures and ethnic groups. It shows that two or more ethnic groups can coexist mutually even when tackling existential situations (this means co-existing with no one losing its traits to another) tolerance and accommodation rather than conflict and ethnic superiority (by this, the difference in culture serves as a strength when different cultures learn from each other) without down playing any cultural and ethnic values of any culture.

The idea behind the unity and mutual co-existence of different ethnic groups shows that interculturality presents the strategy through which there is inter relation between varying cultures, ethnic groups in view of learning from each other and not thinking a particular ethnic group as self-sufficient in itself and Standard for other cultures.

The impact of interculturality is a clear pointer that there are diverse cultures or ethnic groups and these ethnic groups must adopt a means to co-exist together to makeup human society. Hence, this diverse culture ought to learn to live together bearing in mind that every cultural

groups have something to offer. As such Jonathan O. Chimakonam and Dorathy N. Oluwagbemi–Jacob (2022), explain that “the diversity of cultures making up human society necessitates intercultural discourse.” It explains why culture is that identity everyone has and carry out wherever he or she finds him/herself. This difference must not ignite superiority mindset of one’s culture over another but to bring out those aspects where one’s culture needs dependence, with the mindset that every culture is a necessary link in human growth. To support this argument, Jonathan O. Chimakonam and Dorathy N. Oluwagbemi- Jacob (2022) posit that “Interculturality benefits societal well-being because, without peace and mutual co-existence, there cannot be sustainable development.” Although Chimakonam and Oluwagbemi (2022) promote interculturality in handling cultural differences they added that; “the reason why some ills committed against humanity in the form of ethnic cleansing, domination and marginalization of one group of citizens within a country can be explained in terms of deficit in intercultural principles. It follows that an elevated mode of thinking-critical thinking is needed to overcome biases, prejudices and assumptions that foster cultural alienation instead of co-existence, complementarity and solidarity.” To them, it is critical thinking that enables different cultures to exist together without alienation.

Contrary to the above view of Chimakonam and Oluwagbemi-Jacobs, this work posits that interculturality is a method that creates and brings about fair opportunities and co-existence for intercultural unity to be possible. It enables everyone to understand that there can be unity and tolerance in interculturality only when ethnocentric mindset is abused and each mind is built on accepting other cultures as another stand point of viewing reality. This work adds that critical thinking is a positive point but its possibility is dependent on an objective and free ethnocentric mind. According to Negedu and Ojomah (2022), “The validity of intercultural dialogue depends on understanding. This understanding requires people to avoid bringing preconceptions of any kind to the table.” Intercultural dialogue advocates and promotes objective mindset rather than ethnocentric mindset. Interculturality negates cultural superiority and inferiority tussles and creates an open mindset for intercultural development and living in the society.

Interculturality builds a bridge that allows every culture to function and thrive. This bridge necessitates epistemic success because new ideas are learnt from varying cultures and strength if unity is harnessed. The possibility of this intercultural bridge is possible only when the mindset of ethnocentrism is removed. Chimakonam and Oluwagbemi-Jacobs (2023) citing different scholars says;

First and foremost, intercultural engagement requires the parties involved to come with an appropriate mindset. For some, that mindset is that of humility (Friere 1972). For others, it is that of tolerance, concession, accommodation and maybe consensus (Egbai and Chimakonam 2019). Further still others recommend the values of listening, empathy, opening understanding and responsible action (Negedu and Ojomah 2022). These are essential elements of this mindset.

Accordingly, this research holds that the mindset needed for intercultural success in building epistemic bridge for new knowledge and the acceptance of cultural difference as imperative for societal harmony is a mindset free of ethnocentrism. This is because ethnocentric mindset is a bias mindset that advocates and support superiority of a particular culture. Ethnocentrism wants everyone to view reality only from a particular cultural basis. According to Sasha Blakeley, Yolanda Williams (2023), “ethnocentrism is a form of bias wherein individuals believe that their own culture, with all its values, practices and beliefs, is superior to all other human cultures.”

This mindset is capable of destroying unity, humility. It promotes intolerance, violence and begets hegemony. Thus, interculturality can stop this bias through the accommodative vibes it brings. By doing this, everyone sees the necessary link every culture has in relation to other cultures. Hence, where any culture feels the need of insufficiency, it learns from the others and not losing her cultural basis.

Finally, ethnocentric mindset is a problem Nigeria faces and it has resulted in intolerance, violence and cultural and tribal wars. When we promote intercultural values of uniqueness Nigeria will experience strength in her different cultures and unity in Cultural co-existence among other benefits of interculturality.

Conclusion

Interculturality as a concept and aspect of human understanding is of importance to solving some of humanity’s problems today in ways that have not been expressed in this research. We have seen how the concept can be understood and the advantage that we stand to benefit from its application. That is why, on the issue of ethnicity, employing the concept across the various aspects of human activities is considered a viable option in this research. Since we cannot change the facts of our ethnic diversity as a people, we need to employ means of living with it and also make progress with it. To achieve this, for the long run, an approach such as this becomes necessary.

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