THE METAPHYSICAL PROBLEM OF UNITY AND DIVERSITY AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR NATIONAL UNITY

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DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.26514.17604

Abstract

The problem of national unity has become a recurring decimal in national discourses. This has become so endemic that the people place more premium on their regional and tribal affiliations than they do to the country. This has created an atmosphere of mutual suspicion among the different nationalities that constitute the entity called Nigeria. As a result of this unfortunate scenario, different questions come to mind: why has our diversity become more problematic than advantageous? Why is it difficult to forge a common united front as a country? Are there common grounds to explore in our diversity for national unity? These among others form the basis of this discourse. The paper interrogates these issues from the perspective of the metaphysical concept of unity and diversity (the one and many). It is the contention of this paper that, in spite of our diversity, there are more things that unite us than divide us. Our common humanity for instance binds us more than anything that seeks to divide us. There is undoubtedly a common unity that underlies our diversity. Our diversity mirrors our unity. The paper employed the expository and analytical methods in its investigation.
Keywords: Metaphysical, Unity, Diversity, National Unity

Introduction

"If we cannot now end our differences, at least we can help make the world safe for diversity" _John Fitzgerald Kennedy (1917-1963)

One of the ancient problems in philosophy is the problem of unity and diversity. The early philosophers in Ionia were perplexed by the unity (permanence) as well as diversity (change) observable in the universe. How is there a basic unity in the midst of amazing diversity? They consequently adopted a monistic explanation of this intriguing phenomenon positing that, all things were basically one in various forms. However, pluralists and dualist will see the above assertion as biased and prejudiced in favour of monism. The question should rather be: "is being one or many?" Iroegbu puts the question in a better form when he held that: "the senses perceive things as varied, distinct contingent,

individual, multiple and autonomous, though related…. The intellect on the other hand, grasps unity in being….the basic contrast and apparent contradiction between our sense report on reality (as multiple) and the unity report made by the intellect (all is being), is the fundamental problem of one and many" (47). The problem is: which experience is valid, true and certain; the sense report (of many) or the intellect's report (of one)? Resultantly, we caught between being carried away with the assumption that individual existing things in their various positions make up reality. this suggests multiplicity or plurality. On the other hand, there arise sufficient rational arguments that suggest that, in spite of the seeming multiplicity, there is however, a common rallying ground-the one that manifests in such a multiplicity. Western philosophy adopted three approaches to resolve this problem: the monistic approach, the dualistic approach, and the pluralistic approach. The pertinent questions are: is there a basic unity underlying the multiplicity of things in the universe? How do we account for this basic unity? Is dualism and pluralism the main characteristics of the universe?

Nigeria as a country is an amalgam of over three hundred ethnic groups. This diversity over time has thrown up more challenges than prospects for Nigeria, challenges that have threatened the corporate existence of Nigeria. There is mutual suspicion among the various ethnic nationalities which has given vent to disunity in the country. There is a marked and conscious projection of ethnic and clannish preferences instead of a national agenda, which would serve as a springboard for unity and development of the country. A cursory look at the prevailing state of affairs in Nigeria calls for a critical interrogation of this marriage of strange bedfellows. Are we really just an amalgam of strange bedfellows pieced together? Is there an underlying unity that characterized our diversity? If there is, what is the nature of this unity? These questions no doubt underscore the complexity of our diversity. Indeed, Nigeria is a heterogeneous society and unfortunately this has been the bane of nation building and unity from which our diversity springs from, why are there so much divisive proclivities in our people? How can we deploy our basic unity advance the cause of national development and unity that is so elusive? These pertinent questions form the thrust of this discourse

An Overview of Metaphysics

Before we proceed in our discourse, it is pertinent to advance an over of metaphysics. Metaphysics appears to be the most mysterious of all disciplines within philosophy. The appellation throws up images of abstraction and complex doctrines. This lends credence to the idea that, the subject matter of

metaphysics is pure speculation without practical import. Etymologically, the term metaphysics is derived from two Greek words: meta-meaning after, beyond, transcending; and physics-meaning physics, matter, body. Metaphysics is that which concerns itself with that which is beyond the physical (Okafor 1988:17). As a discipline, the origin of metaphysics is generally traced to Aristotle (384-322 BC). Philosophers have expounded variously on the term "metaphysics." Aristotle (in McMahon 1991: 23) conceives metaphysics as a supremely general study which is somehow presupposed by the special sciences. This Aristotelian conception is found with variations in the thoughts of modern philosophers like Descartes, Leibniz and Kant. Some philosophers could have agreed with Aristotle about the comprehensive, general and ultimate nature of metaphysics, they however did not share the concern of Descartes and or Kant with the foundation of science. Bradley (1965:2) understands metaphysics as an attempt to know reality as against mere appearance or against the effort to comprehend the universe, not simply piecemeal or by fragments, but somewhat as a whole. This agrees with Aristotle in contrasting "metaphysics" with departmental or fragmentary studies. Dulles (1995:7) defines metaphysics as that "philosophical study of the real, that which exist independently of the act by which we know it".

For the Greeks, "physical" means the whole corporeal world of experience in so far as it is subject to becoming in any way. Behind or beyond the changeable, there is that which changeless. Apart from the corporeal, there are the incorporeal, Metaphysics concerns itself with these. Hence that which was essentially not experienced by the senses, that which was unchangeable and in some way spiritual, becomes known to the Greeks as the "metaphysical" (Collingswood 1957:19). In line with Aristotle, Maritain (in Kalu 1978:248) conceives metaphysics as the "science of being qua being". it is the science of being as being. This defines the task of metaphysics. From the foregoing, we come to a better understanding that questions relating to metaphysics arise out of and go beyond empirical or scientific questions about the world. The distinctive feature of metaphysics is therefore, the universality of its questions.

Unity and Diversity

As earlier adduced, one of the greatest problems in philosophy is the question of the one and many i.e. unity and multiplicity. For the pre-Socratics, multiplicity was obvious but they wondered whether there was unity at all. They observed that the world seems to made of a multiplicity of things-people, rivers, rocks stars' insects etc. but they supposed that, a universe with a limited number of

particulars will necessitate an essential unity. They figured that the universe could only contain a limited amount of things and if those things were broken down into their   elements, there would only be a limited number of elements. Perhaps, that number is only fifty. But why only fifty? Why not some other amount? There must be a "reason". They figured that, if there were no reason then the universe would be irrational and could not be understood. Only the rational is capable of been understood and to "understand" necessitates reducing multiplicity to unity. Therefore, even in view of the vast amount of particulars in the cosmos, in order to understand them, the universe rationally must be a unity. Hence the term universe (unity in diversity) (Borruso 2007: 38-43)

Thales, Anaximander and Anaximenes all explained the unity in material terms. Heraclitus however saw the unity as change or motion. Heraclitus suggests that, to say something exists means to say that something does not change. The problem therefore, is that if a thing is constantly changing and moving then we can call it nothing, non-being, unreality. If all is unreal because everything changes then nothing can be known because there is nothing to know. Heraclitus saw that everything changes like a river flows and yet he could escape the reality of at least one absolute/unifying truth –the law of change itself which he called logos. Parmenides other hand maintained that change or motion is impossible, because they would involve both non-being and being which being contradictories cannot both be. Thus according to Parmenides, being is, non-being is not. In other words, there is no multiplicity (Popkin 1993:56). In the fifth century, Zeno of Elea argued that, there is no motion and multiplicity in the universe, for that is merely an illusion, actually, everything is one (Copleston 1959:67). In his postulation concerning this matter, Empedocles a fifth century Greek philosopher posited two forces: love and strife. Love brings elements together, while strife splits them apart. Both forces played a role in the creation of the cosmos. When everything was combined together into a single mass under the direction of love, there was no life, consequently strife needed to separate that mass into distinct elements for life to exist (Borrosu 2007: 40).

Both ancient and modern philosophers have deduced that reality is a dynamic unity. Ancient Indian philosophy and Greek philosophy, and later western philosophers used the logic of philosophy and metaphysics to assert that all matter and motion was derived from one substance (Borruso 2007:38)). The wave structure of motion confirms their deductions that one substance must exist to explain how matter is interconnected across the universe. Aristotle further stressed that, among entities, there must be some because which move and combine things (39). There must then be a principle of such a kind that its substance is activity. Flowing from this, Leibniz (in Popkin1966: 323), submitted

that, reality cannot be found except in in one single source because of the interconnection of all things with one another. He maintained that, reality is inconceivable without unity. He stressed further that, substances whether material or immaterial, cannot be conceived in their bare essence without any activity, activity being of the essence of substance in general. It follows from this that, the natural changes of monads come from an internal principle, and that change is continual in each one. Now this connection of all created things with each, and of each with all the rest, means that each simple substance has relations which express all the others.

Comparing his philosophy with that of Hegel, Ludwig Wittgenstein is of the opinion that, while Hegel tries to show all differences to be the same, he sees all similarities to be different. According to him, Hegel sought to overcome differences to reach transcendental unity. Hegel was so concerned with the absolute unity of things in philosophy and politics that he saw everything as evolving towards an eventual unity. However, his yearning for the unity of all things according to Wittgenstein turned Hegel's philosophy into an ideology of absolutism. Wittgenstein later argued for an infinite complexity of the world (Lavine 1984: 402).

The Problem of Unity in Nigeria

Prior to 1914, the geographical expression called Nigeria was non-existent. It was a hugely diverse scattering of tribes and communities, some whose territory overlapped the boundaries of present day Nigeria. These groups with their languages, cultures and political institutions were brought together to form a nation under British rule. While the western world regarded them all as "Nigerians", they considered themselves as members of whichever tribe from which they originated. Despite its federal status, Nigeria is usually characterized as a deeply divided state in which major political issues are vigorously and sometimes violently contested along the lines of the complex ethnic, religious and regional divisions in the country

Unity and cohesion are critical variables in any society. a society that is not united with a sense of purpose cannot meaningfully make any meaningful make any headway. Unfortunately, this critical variable has continued to be elusive in our national life. this is occasioned by a myriad of causes among which is the way and manner the colonialist bequeathed the country to us as well as our collective failure as a people to chart a viable course for the unity and development of the country. From the beginning, the British colonialists forged a country of over 350 ethnic groups, each competing for space and attempt to

coexist, despite obvious differences. The challenge of unity in our diversity has been has been part of our history. Our political structure in the first republic was regionalized. This to some extent laid the foundation for ethnic and sectional proclivities in our people. The political leaders then found it expedient to mobilize and consolidate power in the regions, thereby emerging as ethnic champions (Abubakar 2017:23). The general elections of 1965 after independence necessitated alliances and coalitions that produced political parties with national spread that crisscrossed the regions. However, there was already mutual suspicion and fear of been dominated and other incidental issues among the regions. The build-up of events led to the collapse of the first republic and the civil war that followed, after which there was a 13-year military intervention. In spite of the foregoing, there was an emergence of a national elite class evidenced by the politics of the second republic and beyond. The problem of national unity has been variously engaged by successive administrations in the country, despite these efforts the problem seems to persist. This is partly seen as the dearth good political leadership and will to harness the vast potentials that our diversity offers. The actions and inactions of the present administration of president Muhammadu Buhari are widely seen in recent times as contributing to the divisions in the country. The country appears to be more divided than it has ever been in it's over sixty years of independence under president Buhari.

Causes of Disunity in Nigeria

There are a number of causes that have continually stood in the way of unity and cohesion in the country. The debilitating nature of these causes has weakened the nationalistic psyche and left the country politically, economically, socially, culturally and religiously emaciated. They include but not limited to the under mentioned.

A Skewed Federal Structure

The nature of our structure as a nation also became incidental to lack of unity in the country. The federalism we practice is fundamentally flawed so much that there are deafening calls for a re-negotiation of the terms of our unity as a country. The centre has become too powerful at the expense of the increasingly unviable federating units. According to Abubakar (2017: 23), "*we therefore have an almighty federal government that has assumed so much powers and responsibilities that it does virtually everything either alone or in tandem with the federating units, in the end, very little gets down both at the federal and state level*". Accordingly, he stressed that the people get disillusioned, and in frustration they embrace and imbibe all

sorts of views, beliefs and ideas including ones that suggests that people from the other ethnic group, religious or other regional group is responsible for their woes. This state of affairs no doubt fans the embers of disunity.

Leadership

The problem of leadership has always been a recurring decimal in the dynamics of national unity. In the over sixty years of nationhood, the most critical challenge confronting Nigeria as a nation appears to be credible leadership. Scholars of various persuasions have queried the dearth of credible leadership in the country which has become perennial in spite of the abundance of human and material resources at their disposal. Some put the blame on the colonial misadventure in Nigeria, while others see corruption and lack of vision on both past and present leaders as contributing to the leadership problem (Onodugo 2016:1). These leadership challenges are evidenced in political, social and economic instability and the prevalence of ethnic, communal, and religious crisis which have bedeviled Nigeria and impacted negatively on national development and unity. In order words, the monumental wave of violence, insecurity, crime rates, economic recession coupled with the near break down of law and order in some parts of the country are attributes of a dysfunctional leadership. According to Ribadu (2017:6), "we laugh and hug in public and plot against each other when we retire to our ethno-religious enclaves". There is a marked nexus between the challenge of national unity and the inadequacies of many of our leaders at all levels. This has compounded the already tensed and precarious state of affairs in the country thereby, widening the gulf of divisions among the people. As a nation, we lack a unifying leader that will aggregate the aspirations of the people and rally them for national unity and development. What we have are regional and tribal leaders that have continued to nurture and project these regional and sectional agenda at the expense of our unity and development.

Socio-Economic Inequalities

Socio-economic inequality is another germane issue that is threatening the unity of the country. A critical component in national unity is the building of a common citizenship. This seems to be a tall order when citizens radically have different qualities of life. Responsible nations try to establish a base line of social and economic rights which all citizens benefit from through economic development and social welfare safety nets. In Nigeria, citizens are denied the most basic rights and where there is a semblance of these rights, there are marked variations in their enjoyment. For instance, the actions and inactions of the present government concerning the herder-farmer crisis in the country, has

fuelled the conception that some citizens are more equal than others in a country that is supposed to be for all. The consequence of this is, the people become indifferent to the national and societal cause due to lack of attention from the state. Others are already resorting to safe help especially in the face of the security challenges which have worsened the quest for unity. This breeds disaffection, fear and suspicion in the minds of the people and keep them further polarized.

In the recent past, other "primordial" identities and sentiments that have gained wide currency and greater political significance, especially in contestations over citizenship, are those of indigenes, non-indigenes, migrants and settlers. These categorizations have ethnic, communal, religious and regional origins, and have evolved from an entrenched system of discriminatory practices in which non-indigenes, migrants and settlers are excluded from having equal access to resources, rights and privileges of a locality, community, or state to which "sons and daughters of the soil" have first or exclusive access. The system nurtures and sustains a hierarchical, unequal system of citizenship that has sparked violent conflicts all over the country and goes to the very heart of the national question.

Religion

According to Oluduro (2010:23), the average Nigerian is very religious. Religion plays a critical role in Nigerian society and has expressed itself as a potent force in the geo-political development of the country. This force has been deployed negatively in many instances, resulting into numerous conflicts in Nigeria. Inter-religious conflicts are components of the dynamics of identity politics in Nigeria. The political elite always take undue advantage of the multi-dimensional entities especially during electioneering campaigns. For instance, during the build up to the 2015 presidential election, the religious card was deployed and played to the fullest. The aftershocks of that have continued to re-vibrate in the country till date. This has the potential of dividing rather than uniting the people. Canci and Odukoya (2016:23) submitted that: "this politicization of religious identies during contests for political office often lacks any sustaining unifying ideology". Resultantly, religion attains the level of deification which has become problematic. In their inordinate and insatiable quest to assume power and appropriate state resources, the elite constantly modify patterns of political domination. In this vain, fears and anxieties are bred that motivate an upsurge in struggle and intolerance (Ibrahim & Kazah-Toure 2003:24).

Hate Speech

The plethora of hate speeches is another disturbing trend in the dynamics of national unity. The social media space in the country is inundated with a barrage of hateful material in the form of speeches and inciting statements from one part of the country against the other, from one religious affiliation against the other, from one political divide against the other. This is indicative of the fact that the country is bitterly divided. These hate and inciting speeches are a potent threat to national unity. Nigerians are not united in confronting the common challenges that face us as a nation rather we are polarized along ethnic foundations that threatened the unity of the country. The unhealthy ethnic agitations across the country are fuelled by mistrust and are antithetical to national unity. Much as the various ethnic groups have the right to vent their grievances against perceived injustice meted out to them, it should be moderated by a sense of responsibility and nationalism.

Unity and Diversity: A Reconciliation

The philosophical debate concerning change and permanence, one and many, unity and diversity as earlier adduced is an enduring one. The problem at stake is that: how is it that what is construed as change really takes place? By implication, how is diversity possible? And how did things remain the same (united) despite the occurrence of change (diversity). This question no doubt triggered a chain of succeeding questions. Thus, if everything changes all the time, could there be any permanent, real, unchanging feature of the universe? And if reality were actually unchanging and unchangeable (united), how could it have anything to do with the apparent world of change (diversity), and how could it explain the world of change or diversity? It seemed to early philosophers that, change and permanence were incompatible, and reality has to be one or the other, either constantly changing or completely permanent (Aja 2001: 28). How can these two seemingly opposed doctrines be harmonized? In an attempt to resolve and reconcile this controversy, Aristotle posited the following:

According to Aristotle, every natural object is undergoing change. However, in this process there is not only something that changes, there is also something that stays the same. Instead of dismissing the changing object that it is not completely permanent, and therefore unreal, one should try to understand what change involves in order to ascertain what reality consists of. To do this, one must understand the "four causes" involved in a change. These are four answers to questions about anything that changes. These include material, formal, efficient and final causes. There is a substantial change from the material cause (prime

matter that changes something) of a thing into a formal cause (the shape that something changes into) the efficient cause (the agent responsible for bringing about the change) and the final cause (the goal or reason for which something is made) (McMahon 1991:45)

In every change then, there is something that remains the same (unity), that is the matter, and there is something that change (diversity), that is the form. Change is thus a process of actualizing potentialities by altering matter in one form so that it becomes matter in another form. Thus when a piece of paper changes into ashes when burnt, in a material sense there is a real permanent element, while in a formal sense, there has been a real change (Bambrough 1963: 43).

Implications for National Unity

As adduced above, Nigeria is a heterogeneous society unfortunately this has been more problematic than advantageous especially in terms of national unity and peace which is a crucial element in national development. More often than not, people are more aligned to their ethnic nationalities and identities than the national identity. It is in line with the foregoing that the submission of one of Nigeria's foremost nationalist chief Obafemi Awolowo becomes plausible: "Nigeria, to move forward and progressively as a nation, there was no need to consider our inter-ethnic differences and cultural background". Robert Baa shares the same sentiments when he posited that: "where common values are not identified, national integration is not attainable" (43). The anticipated national unity will remain "a fleeting illusion to be pursued but never attained" without placing collective aspirations, unity and other variables of the Nigerian project over parochial ethnic and sectional agenda.

From the foregoing, philosophers were and are still perplexed about the reality of apparent unity in the midst of glaring diversity. This implies that unity and diversity are constitutive elements of the cosmos. Despite the diversity inherent in the universe, there seem to be an underlying unity that characterized this diversity. As a nation, it is incumbent upon us to look beyond our diversity especially from the perspective of negativity and emphasize rather that primordial principle that unites us despite our diversity. First, we share in the same humanity which is a universal concept that binds us irrespective of our differences. Plato prefigured this fundamental unity in his world of forms or ideas. He emphasized the essence of things as being stable and immutable in his world of forms and every individual thing as participating in these universal concepts (Rowe 2012:24). Conceptually as individual human beings, we first of

all derive from this universal humanity which underlies our common bond. The differences of tribe, culture, religion, status, etc. does not define our essence.

Just like the Heraclitean perspective, despite the reality of our diversity, we cannot escape the reality of one absolute unifying truth, that we are members of the universal human family. This is a primordial truth that cannot be doubted without contradiction. Our diversity therefore, presupposes a unity which cannot be wished away. Ewelu (2011: 214), lends credence to this when he maintained that, "the oneness of nature is in the form of unity. Unity implies plurality. There is unity only when there are diversities". In unity, all the diverse qualities of the many are organized into one. Unity respects every member and every member accepts every member the way he or she is and tries to allow them contribute what they have in order to actualize the aspirations of the union. The beauty of nature lies in its varieties, similarly, our strength as a nation lies in our diversity. It is not within our purview to strive for uniformity as a nation in terms of tribe, language, culture/tradition etc. rather it is imperative for us to unify the wealth and all the advantages inherent in our diversity for unity, peace and national development.

In recent times our acts of commission and omission have fuelled and emphasized more the things that divide us more than those that unite us. This no doubt has frustrated efforts geared towards national unity and peace. Our unity as a nation is a metaphysical reality that is evident in our diversity. Flowing from the submission of Aristotle, something always endures in the midst of change that sustains the change itself. Consequently, despite obvious change and differences in our tribes, languages, cultures, religion, etc. there is a unity that metaphysically weaves us together and continues to endure even in the course of our chequered history.

Conclusion

It is possible to understand life as the existence of a living being, and as the co-existence of all the living beings that obey the laws of nature. It is difficult to understand how all the living beings can be different and simultaneously have something essentially in common. The colours of the rainbow illustrate this clearly. Each colour of a rainbow can exist separately, but in the colour spectrum, all the colours are organized in a special order and create a unity. All living beings are systems. This is the main principle of the unity of life. a system has a unity that is not equal to the sum of its parts. Some of the elements in a system are essential, others are valuable, but none of them functions outside the system.

Unity as a crucial element for peace and meaningful development of any nation cannot be over emphasized. Nigeria as a nation has witnessed a barrage of crisis occasioned by lack of unity which is a fallout of several factors. However, it is pertinent to point out here that, unity in Nigeria should be anchored on equity, fairness and openness. When these ingredients are present, unity will become feasible and national development becomes one of the fallouts of unity. Our diversity stems from the commonality of our humanity, this is the fundamental basis of our unity and we cannot wish away that fact. We may be diverse, but our diversity is sustained by a fundamental principle which is unity. Cut off from each other, we may not achieve our full potentialities as a nation. It is incumbent upon us to jealously guard this unity while exploring our diversity, as anything to the contrary will not only impede the quest for peace and development but also generate bad blood and disaffection and in the process deepen the negative divisions that are already rearing their ugly heads.

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