

The Role of Counselling in Engendering Peace in the Nigerian Multi-Cultural Settings

Matthew Ojong Achigbe, Ph.D
Institute of Education
University of Calabar, Calabar
Cross River State, Nigeria
ojachigbe@yahoo.com

Abstract

Nigeria, a multi-ethnic nation has recklessly worked herself to the brink of self destruction and disintegration by taking her multi-cultural configuration for granted. Through a careful analysis of activities, actions and deeds of members of major ethnic nationalities in the public domain in relation to the numerous ethnic minorities that form the component parts of Nigeria and a comparative study of some similar nations of the world, certain cultural nuances were identified as sources of conflict among the culture groups which needed to be addressed for a peaceful and harmonious coexistence. With simple logic of deduction, the study suggested among others cultural understanding, religious tolerance and education as a means of restoring peace in the conflict-ridden Nigeria. The study recommends multicultural Counselling in the Nigerian setting as an intervention strategy.

Keywords: Peace, multi-ethnic, Counselling implications, multi-cultural

Introduction

There are hardly any mono-ethnic or monolithic societies anymore. With technology and growing world civilization, the society has become one big assortment of people. This “melting pot,” unlike in most other nations of the world, is radically generating issues of adjustment of the various people that have come to find themselves together (Davis, Elam, & Sater, 2012; Mahfouz, 2013). Some of these issues became complicated and have degenerated into conflicts with dire consequences of hostility and displacement. These conflicts, in general perspective, were political, economic, socio-cultural and religious in nature which must have triggered off the movement of some people from one locality to the other beyond the era of the wandering early man (Gopal, 2015). Unlike primitive societies, the modern society has acquired a new character that is posing fresh challenges to its members. Original settlers are laying claims to some rights of citizenship and later immigrants and settlers are also demanding some or full concession of rights of citizenship especially that, all groups of people are believed to have migrated at one point of history or the other (Achigbe, 2018). There are many other pressures

including land allocation as in Kenya and the sharing of commonwealth as well as the growing number of minorities, sub groups and cultures as found in Britain, Switzerland and United States (Jarikre, 2016; BBC,2010; Renshon & Renshon, 2011) that are also posing fresh challenges. In recent times, Arab Spring uprising in North Africa and Middle East is a case in point which has inspired a new era of agitation for freedom, citizens' rights, justice and the rule of law in these regions and is spreading like wild fire to other parts of the globe (Gallagher, 2017).

In Nigeria, the society has become so restive that the foundation of the nation is being threatened. There is great bickering, violence and insecurity from the different sections, segments and layers of the citizenry whose freedom and rights have been perceived to be variously curtailed by the deliberate action and inaction of those in authority and control in public life in protection of own ethnic group (Jarikre, 2016). The Boko Haram insurgency in the North East; the agitation for independence by the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) in the South East; the struggle to control own resources of the oil rich region of Niger Delta by the Militants and Avengers; the invasions of host communities by nomadic herdsman of Hausa-Fulani extraction in the Middle Belt and southern regions of the country and the general agitation for the restructuring of the country to grant more statutory responsibilities to the periphery, are clear facts about a nation riddled with conflicts and agitation (Achigbe, 2016; Nwachukwu, 2018; Ajodo-Adebanjoko, 2017).

The purpose of this paper is to create awareness on how often our self-destructive instinct can place us on a suicide mission as a political, economic and social entity and to call on counsellors to stand up to their professional calling and help the citizens and the nation out of imminent disintegration.

Conceptual Framework of Multi-culturalism and peace: The concept of multiculturalism is derived from the discipline of sociology. According to Chegg Tutors (2016), the concept refers to one of the ways of approaching cultural diversity in the society. It expresses the view that cultural differences should not only be respected but encouraged. It is founded on the belief that members of different cultures can live peacefully with one another. Generally speaking, the history of mankind is founded on migration. The primitive man was basically a wanderer and wandered to settle in a particular locality as a civilizing influence (Gopal, 2015). The argument of these experts that with the passage of time different peoples come to settle in the same environment to share common resources both natural and artificial including land, flora and fauna, road and path, water source, habitat, security, etc. to form different layers of immigrants. The concept of aboriginal inhabitants is therefore only valid in theory. In actual practice, it does not

exist. The problem is man himself, his greed and his acquisitive tendencies (Hadid, 2015; Brunnsma, Smith & Gran, 2015; Houghton, 2005).

Peace: Peace means many things and is perceived differently by many. Wikipedia gives the meaning of peace as freedom from trouble. It also means order, harmony, concord, goodwill, friendship, non-aggression, nonviolence and many more. That notwithstanding, UNESCO's understanding of peace as vividly expressed by Chandlar (2018) is more all embracing as it encompasses cultural diversity and pluralism, human rights, social cohesion, civic engagement, etc. From the foregoing, peace includes mental and physical health, integrated family, friendship, love etc. He further asserts that peace is not necessarily the absence of trouble but solving problems through peaceful means; through dialogue, education, knowledge, and through other human ways. This agrees with Martin Luther King, Jnr who says true peace is not merely the absence of tension, it is the presence of justice; and the great philosopher, Albert Einstein who said peace is not just the absence of war but the presence of justice, of law, of order – in short of government (Chandler, 2015).

Culture and ethnicity: Culture, according to Gratton (2017), is the entire body of knowledge and beliefs, attitudes and practices which are embodied in the society with its social, political and economic implications. This definition agrees with Zimmermann (2017) that culture is the characteristics and knowledge of a particular group of people, encompassing language, religion, cuisine, social habits, music and arts. More simply put, culture is a way of life of a people. Nnenna (2016) perceives ethnicity as the sum of traits such as religion, language, ancestral heritage and group identification characteristic of a particular group of people. In other words, ethnicity is the behaviour pattern associated with a group of people. From the foregoing, it is clear that everyone belongs to an ethnic or cultural group.

Multi-Culturalism in Nigeria

The pursuit of multi-culturalism has lent itself to crisis situation in different parts of the world including the former Soviet Union, the Gulf region and in parts of Africa particularly Rwanda, Burundi, Libya, Egypt, Kenya, Somalia, Ethiopia and Sierra Leone (Jang, 2012). It is the dire consequences of these conflicts that stirred the then UN Secretary-General, Kofi Anan to visit Rwanda and Burundi in 2007 (Daniel, 2011). In the countries mentioned, the impact of these conflicts has been truly varied and disastrous. The most grievous of these consequences has been the wastage of human life and the more serious implication of outright genocide or ethnic cleansing. In Nigeria, the situation is not different. It is what Nigeria has been enmeshed in for quite a while because of the generally hostile behaviour, attitudes, utterances and conduct of some individuals and members of some ethnic nationalities towards one another. The recent attack of Fulani herdsmen on farmers

and churches in Benue, Nasarawa and Taraba States leading to gruesome killing of innocent and unsuspecting citizens including Rev. Fathers and Christians are heartrending instances (Ebhomele, 2018; Ibeh, 2018). The frequent resort to hate speech among members of different ethnic groups is another evidence of ethnic hostilities (Bello, 2017). The formation of ethnic associations to establish a strong and vocal voice to protect and project members is a clear way of fanning ethnic interest (Igwarra, 2010). Ethnicity is a cultural attitude among the citizens and has been fundamental to the prevalent hostility in Nigeria. Besides all these, are the cultural and religious differences. It is for this that John and Usoro (2016) assert that democracy can either encourage or discourage cultural pluralism in a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious Nigeria depending on how certain factors are handled.

Issues of multi-ethnicity and conflicts: A lot of issues challenge the Nigerian nation on her way to a harmonious coexistence in her multi-layered and multi-ethnic configuration. The most prevalent is sheer ethnicity. This issue comes to limelight more when members of different ethnic groups interact at the public arena or level. According to Nnanna (2016), Nigeria is a slave to her ethnic origin. He emphasizes that until the amalgamation in 1914, Nigeria existed as discrete ethnic entities and was forced into a country without their consent. With varying cultures, traditions, values and language in incredible contradictions, the polity is expectedly chaotic, with the major ethnic groups of Hausa-Fulani, Igbo and Yoruba bestriding themselves as overlords and competing riotously and unhealthily for spheres of influence in politics, economic and religion. This kind of scenario compels majority of members to fan ethnic, cultural and religious identities.

Besides, the sheer number and size of the ethnic groups are a problem to contend with. The exact figure of the number of ethnic groups in Nigeria is not certain. Ebiem (2013) says they are 250 nationalities while Nwachukwu (2013) asserts that Nigeria has more than 350 ethnic groups. Tony (2017) in his attempt to ascertain the exact figure identifies 371 separate groups in Nigeria. These figures are conflicting because they are not adopting common criteria in determining what constitute an ethnic group. In whichever perspective this issue is viewed, there are too many ethnic groups in Nigeria and the individuals' preferences and choices tend towards own group or culture in public life and activity. This tendency is founded on primordial relationship including inter-marriages, inter-mingling and assimilation which has created cultural affinity and identity, and given some sort of security that has laid the foundation of crisis in the country (Nnenna, 2016).

Besides sheer multiplicity of ethnic configuration, most major ethnic or cultural groups possess cultural practices that are remarkably different from one another. The

tendency is for the citizens to act in different ways in the same situation and refuse to yield to common grounds as if there is a prototype culture anywhere in the world. In other climes, differences and identity are appreciated and preserved. In the United Kingdom, Northern Ireland has continued to exist as Irish separate from the British. Though Breton is the dominant group with English language spoken nationally, the Welsh, Scot and Irish are allowed to exist side by side. Even Cornish in south west England that was as good as being extinct is being supported by the government for its revival because diversity is very much appreciated (British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), 2010). In Switzerland, in order to maintain ethnic nationalities, the citizens have entrenched their multi-lingual identity in their national constitution thus making German, French, Italian and Romansh official languages (Switzerland constitution, Article 2.2). In the United States where there exist many more ethnic groups than can ever be imagined anywhere on the globe, ethnicity is no longer an issue. Even segregation which was a lingering racial conflict between the white and the blacks has been dissolved since the 1960s removing all issues of racial inequality (Muscato, 2018).

In Nigeria, instead of the different ethnic groups accepting their diversity for nation building, ethnic differences are rather being emphasized for national disintegration. The majority ethnic groups, in their separate ways are using their political dominance, access to common wealth and strong religious presence to subdue one another and also curtail the liberty of the minorities in the nation (Arowosegbe, 2016; Anca & Odukoya, 2016; Roseblum & Travis, 2018).

There is also the craze for the major ethnic groups to secure disproportionately large political space and preside over huge economic and social opportunities and benefits for themselves at the detriment of the vulnerable minorities. It is for this reason that the erstwhile prominent voice of the minority is today lost or has become faint in the public domain. In the colonial era, it was the voices of king Jaja of Opobo and Nana of Itsekiri, Oba of Benin, Obong of Calabar etc. that counted and inspired the spirit of nationalism and nation building among the Nigerian elite (Jacob, 2012). It is also for the same reason that Ken Saro-wiwa, leader of the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) was unjustifiably executed and the voice of the deprived and disaffected Ogoni people of the oil rich Niger Delta silenced and driven underground (The Goldman Prize, 2018). This has limited the access of the minorities to common wealth and aggravated poverty and living condition among them. This is grave if one considers that it is even on the soil of some of these minorities that the wealth of the nation is derived thus, a case of killing the goose that lays the golden egg. It is this unfair and unjust relationship that has generated distrust, biases and prejudices that is causing the upwelling and unleashing of hate

and social violence among the different rival groups in Nigeria (Agbokwuru, 2013; Amaza, 2014; Heerten & Moses, 2014).

More fundamentally is religious intolerance. Religion is fundamental to a group of people and the foundation of life of all societies. It provides answers to all questions and problems of human existence and cannot be easily compromised (Pecorino, 2016). In Nigeria, both Christians and Muslims are fanatical about their faith and can go any length to defend their respective religion. The Hausa - Fulani in the North are generally Muslims while the South is the enclave of the Christians (Amaza, 2014). The two religions are therefore almost conterminous with the two regions, the North and the South and any action, be it political, economic or socio cultural can easily take a religious coloration or assume a religious interpretation. Nigeria has encountered numerous conflicts with religious connotations which have led to a high level of social inequality, insecurity and deprivation with disastrous consequences including poor governance, corruption and social violence. Under this condition the basic rights of citizenship and right to life have been seriously curtailed and has compelled the citizens to resort to self-help and self-defense for existence (Shibayan, 2018).

Approach to Peaceful Coexistence and Cultural Understanding

From the foregoing discussion, Nigeria can coexist peacefully and pave way for unfettered and even development irrespective of her multi-layered and multi- ethnic composition. If the United States of America can be a “melting pot” of many cultures and remain one of the most civilized, most culture fare and most developed societies of the world then Nigeria can become the “salad bowl” or in a local parlance, the “Ekpangkukwo” of ethnic plurality (Muscato, 2018). Ekpangkukwo is an Efik cuisine with a rich variety of ingredients. This brings to bear the statement accredited to John and Usoro (2016) that democracy as practised in Nigeria can either encourage or discourage ethnic pluralism depending on how certain factors are handled. The pivot on which all the factors revolve is cultural understanding. This means awareness and appreciation of the various ethnic backgrounds, political institutional arrangements of the different cultural groups, socioeconomic opportunities and religious practices through education (Ebiem, 2013; Ebingbo & Okoye, 2015; Uwenyi, 2017).

Counselling Implications

From the preceding discourse, multi-cultural Counselling is the practice that can offer effective intervention to culturally diverse clients. In Nigeria where there is an estimated ethnic configuration of 371 ethnic groups, the national situation is conflict prone and so counsellors must help their clients accommodate the cultural differences that exist between their ethnic groups and others'. These differences

border more especially on culture, religion, customs and socioeconomic background of individuals and ethnic groups. It is also pertinent to view multi-cultural Counselling in terms of therapeutic approach, communication values, self-awareness and flexibility (Alliant, 2017).

Besides, the conflict situation that is common in a multi-cultural society such as Nigeria demands the counsellors to provide services that will cater for all spheres of national life. Some of the concerns of national life in Nigeria include politics, religion, resource control, resource allocation, parlous poverty, unemployment, the curtailment of the rule of law etc which threaten the corporate existence of the Nigerian State (Salawu & Abdulkadir, 2011; Kalejaiye & Alliyu, 2013; Nwadiolor & Uzoigwe, 2013).

Conclusion

There is hardly any society without more than one ethnic or culture groups. Most ethnic groups are ethnocentric and are largely ignorant of others. This creates a lot of cultural barriers, discrimination and segregation capable of causing tension in the society. It is therefore imperative that while maintaining the identity of different groups their commonalities should always be emphasized. The national government should inculcate a sense of cultural understanding by educating the people to realize the importance of ethnic groups, the need to put in place a political institutional arrangements where the different ethnic groups can collaborate and dialogue on issues of governance; create economic opportunities for all citizens irrespective of nationality and tongue; and more importantly, religious tolerance. In this way, the citizens will continue into 21st Century a happier society. The counsellor must bear in mind that Nigeria is a nation of great diversity and that he is there for all groups. This will enable him build the necessary trust and confidentiality for effective counselling intervention.

References

- Achigbe, M. O. (2018). *Obubra growth and development in contemporary times*. Calabar: Jochrisam Business Ventures.
- Achigbe, M. O. (2016). Boko Haram insurgency in North East Nigeria: A perspective for attainment of global peace. *International Conference on Education, Research and Innovation (ICERI 2016) Seville Spain*. Retrieved from <https://library.iated.org/authors/MatthewAchigbe>
- Agbokwuru, C. (2013). Ethnic prejudice and the problem of peaceful coexistence in Nigeria. *European Scientific Journal*, 9(5), 86-93.
- Ajodo – Adebajoko, A. (2017). Towards ending conflict and insecurity in the Niger Delta region. African centre for the constructive resolution of disputes. Retrieved from www.reliefweb.int/report-towards-en...

- Alliant International University (2017). Why multi-cultural Counselling is essential to the success of today's therapist. Chicago: Alliant International University. Retrieved from [www.alliant.edu>cspp](http://www.alliant.edu/cspp)
- Amaza, M. (2014, April 23). Northern Nigeria: Dispelling myth and stereotypes."Retrieved from [www.afripol.org>item1633](http://www.afripol.org/item1633)
- Arowosegbe, J. O. (2016). Ethnic minorities and land question in Nigeria. *Review of African Political Economy*, 43(148), 260-276.
- Bello, A. (2017). Dominance and difference - rival visions of ethnicity in Nigeria. *Ethnic and Social Studies*, 24(1), 86-103.
- BBC (2010, August 10). UK majority back multiculturalism. BBC News.
- Brunsma, D. L., Iyall Smith, K. E. & Gran, B. K. (2015). *Handbook on Sociology and Human Rights*. New York: Routledge.
- Canci, H. & Odukoya, O. A. (2016). Ethnic and religious crisis in Nigeria: A specific analysis upon identities (1999-2013). *African Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 16(1). Retrieved from [https://www.ajol.info>amreally>article>view](https://www.ajol.info/amreally/article/view)
- Chandler, O. (2018). Peace is not just the absence of war but the presence of justice, of law, of order – in short, of government. Quotable quote. Goodreads: Book Reviews [www.goodreads.com>quotes >7](http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/7)
- Chavan, A. (2016). Cultural Assimilation: Meaning and examples for better clarity.
- Chegg Tutors (2016, March 23). Multiculturalism. Chegg Study: Chegg Inc. Retrieved from www.chegg.com>
- Daniel, K. (2011). Historical manifestation of ethnocentrism and its challenges today. *International Journal of Applied Sociology*, 1(1), 8-14.
- Davis, S. L., Elam, J. C., & Sater, (2012, August 15). Why do we celebrate diversity? Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity. The Ohio State University. Retrieved from [www.kirwaninstitute.osu.edu>whydowecel](http://www.kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/whydowecel)
- Deluca, H. (2016). Nigerian ethnic groups: The nature of culture. Retrieved from [https://study.com>academy>lesson>ni](https://study.com/academy/lesson/ni) ...
- Ebhomele, E. (2018, April 26). Do not allow Nigeria's enemies to use you to destroy the country: Buhari begs Benue people. Retrieved from www.najia.ng
- Ebiem, O. (2017, May 10). Full list of all 371 tribes in Nigeria, states where they originate. Retrieved from [https://Vanguardngr.com>news](https://Vanguardngr.com/news)
- Ebimgbo, S. O. & Okoye, U. (2015). Promoting cultural diversity for sustainable development in Nigeria: The role of social Workers. International Conference on Harnessing Diversity for Sustainable Development. Nsukka: University of Nigeria.
- Gallagher, P. (2015, October 20). Religious and cultural pluralism and peaceful coexistence in the Middle East. Finestra Mondo: Dimension Font. Retrieved from [www.consolata.org>new>finestra>item](http://www.consolata.org/new/finestra/item)

- Gopal, R. R. (2015, June 14). Early man was always on the move. Modern man too was a wanderer. Retrieved from [www.meritnation.com>question](http://www.meritnation.com/question)
- Gratton, L. (2017, October, 23). What is culture? Chronicle of Culture and Law. Retrieved from [www.chronicle.com>dossiers>definitely](http://www.chronicle.com/dossiers/definitely) ...
- Hadid, M. (2015). *Political compassion*. New York: Page Publishing Inc.
- Heerten, L. & Moses, A. D. (2014). The Nigerian- Biafra war: Post colonial conflict and the question of genocide. *Journal of genocide research*, 16(2-3), 169-203.
- Hinda, A. (2018, March 18). Is ethnic conflict avoidable? Retrieved from www.e-ir.info
- Houghton Muffins Company (2005). Multiculturalism. The New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy, (3rd ed). Retrieved from <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/multiculturalism>
- Ibeh, N. (2018, April 26). Breaking News: Gunmen invade another church in Benue; 7 reported killed. Retrieved from [https://www.naija.ng>hag>fulaniherds](https://www.naija.ng/hag/fulaniherds)
- Igwara, O. (2010, December 7). Dominance and differences: Rival visions of ethnicity in Nigeria. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 24(1), 86-103. Retrieved from <https://www.tandfonline.com>
- Jacob, R. I. (2012). A history survey of ethnic conflicts in Nigeria. *Asian Social Science*, 8(4). Retrieved from <https://www.ccsenet.org/ass>
- Jang, S. Y. (2012). The causes of Sierra Leone civil war (1991-1992). Retrieved from <https://www.e-ir.info>
- Jarikre, M. (2016). Ethnicity, governance and social order in Africa. In O. A. Oyeshile & F. Offor (Eds.). *Ethics, Governance and Social Order in Africa: Essays in honour of Godwin S. Sogolo*. Ibadan: Zenith Book House Ltd.
- John, E. O. & Usoro, U.I. (2016). Plural society and the challenge of democratic practice in Nigeria. *Developing Country Studies*, 6 (1), 139 – 149.
- Kalejaiye, P. O. & Alliyu, N. (2013). Ethnic politics and social conflicts: Factors in Nigeria's underdevelopment. *The Journal of International Social Research*, 6(27), 252-262.
- Mahfouz, M. (2013). America's melting pot or salad bowl: the stage immigrants' dilemma. *Journal of foreign languages, cultures and civilizations*, 1(2), 1-17.
- Muscato, C. (2018). Ethnic groups in America. Retrieved from [https://www.study.com>academy/lesson>et](https://www.study.com/academy/lesson/)
- Nnenna, O. (2016, December 20). The problem of ethnicity in Nigeria. The Nigerian Observer: Bendel Newspaper Company Limited.
- Nwachukwu, D. (2013). List of 350+ ethnic groups in Nigeria, tribes, their languages and culture. Retrieved from: www.earlyface.com.ng
- Nwachukwu, J. O. (2018, April 30). Benue attacks: Pope Francis reacts to killing of Rev. Fathers, 17 others by herdsmen. Retrieved from www.dailypost.ng

- Nwadiakor, K. L. & Uzoigwe, A. M. (2013). Ethnicity and social instability in Nigeria: The place of religion. *Unizik Journal of Arts and Humanities*, 14(3), 65-85.
- Okafor, N. W. (2014). Victimization during the Nigerian civil war: A focus on the Asaba massacre. Tilburg: University of Tilburg. Retrieved from <http://www.arno.uvt.nl/show>
- Percorino, P. A. (2016). *Introduction to Philosophy: An Outline Textbook*. Cuny: Queensborough Community College.
- Renshon, S. & Renshon, S. (2011). Multiculturalism in the US: Cultural narcissism and the politics of recognition. Retrieved from <https://www.cis.org/Renshon/multiculturalis> ...
- Roseblum, K. & Travis, T. (2016). *The Meaning of Difference: American Construction of Race, Ethnicity, Sex and Gender, Social Class, Sex Orientation, and Disability* (7th ed.). New York: McGraw Hill Education.
- Salawu, A. A. & Abdulkadir, O. R. (2011). *Introduction to the Theory and Practice of Guidance and Counselling*. Ilorin: Integrity Publication.
- Sibayan, D. (2018, March 24). The armed forces are not neutral. Retrieved from www.informationng.com/2018/w ...
- Switzerland News (2005, August 10). The Federal Constitution of the Swiss Confederation, 18 April, 1991, Article 1(4). Switzerland News, August 10, 2005)
- The Goldman Environmental Prize (2018). Ken Saro-Wiwa, 1995 Goldman Prize Recipient Africa. The Goldman Environmental Prize. Retrieved from <https://www.goldmanprize.org>
- Tony, E. (2017, May 10). Full list of all the 371 tribes in Nigeria, states where they originate. Retrieved from www.vanguardngr.com/news
- Uwenyi, O. (2017). Nigeria is set to become the poverty capital of the world by 2018. Retrieved from www.konbini.com/lifestyle/Nigeria.p
- Zimmermann, K. A. (2017: July 12). What is culture? Definition of culture. Retrieved from www.livescience.com