

JURGEN HABERMAS' CONCEPT OF COMMUNICATIVE RATIONALITY AS A SOLUTION TO ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS BIGOTRY IN NIGERIA'S SOCIO-POLITICAL MILIEU

Kelechi Collins AMADI
Department of Philosophy
Faculty of Humanities
Redeemer's University, Ede
Osun State, Nigeria
Email: amadik@run.edu.ng
Phone: 09155666329
&
Ifechukwu NDIANEFOO (PhD)
Department of Philosophy
Faculty of Arts
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria
Email: ij.ndianefoo@unizik.edu.ng
Phone: 07031237258

ABSTRACT

Nigeria as a country is ravaged by the tension and crises engendered by ethnic and religious bigotry. This reality manifests in various forms of ethno-religious conflicts experienced across the nation. Many thinkers who seek solutions to Nigeria's predicaments usually emphasize the best system of government to adopt, the best economic structure to implement, or the best leadership style to apply. Arguably, these thinkers do not lay enough emphasis on the key role of rational communication in attaining understanding and consensus among the diverse peoples and ethnic groups in Nigeria. Using the method of phenomenological exposition and philosophical analysis, this paper argues that Jürgen Habermas' idea of communicative rationality offers a rational framework through which individuals—irrespective of ethnic or religious differences—can reach understanding and consensus without resorting to violent conflicts or destructive revolution. Habermas' communicative rationality is a form of communication geared toward achieving, sustaining, and reviewing consensus based on validity claims that are open to intersubjective recognition and criticism. It is a process through which different validity claims are brought to satisfactory resolution under an "ideal speech situation," which allows individuals the freedom to express their views and make rational arguments without fear, coercion, or intimidation. In other words, Habermasian communicative rationality points the way to peaceful coexistence among the peoples of Nigeria, a necessary condition for the country's social and economic development. The contributions of this paper include the revival of academic discourse within the epistemic community with emphasis on the essential role of rational communication in achieving peaceful coexistence; the promotion of a culture of communicative rationality among the various ethnic groups in Nigeria; and the institutionalization of rational communication across diverse spheres of interaction—including politics, the economy, religion, culture, and academia.

Keywords: Ethno-religious Bigotry, Jürgen Habermas, Communicative Rationality

INTRODUCTION

Ethnic and religious intolerance in Nigeria constitute a huge problem to its corporate existence as a country. The manifestation of ethnic and religious bigotry in Nigeria is a stark reality. The truism is that Nigeria is bedeviled by social and political problems: political-cum-leadership crisis, mismanagement of resources, insecurity, terrorism, insurgency, banditry, kidnapping, killings, persistent ethnic agitations, injustice, poverty, excruciating hunger, unemployment, underdevelopment, and so on; however, the predicament of ethnic-cum-religious bigotry is a fundamental one. If one looks into the various facets of Nigerian society, one would be sure to discover a major causal element of ethnic and religious bigotry in all the various conflicts and predicament bedeviling the Nigerian society. If one looks through the social media, one will agree that the internet space of Nigeria is saturated with materials, publications, pictures, video clips, hate speeches, statements, and comments generated by ethnic and religious bigotry. In Nigeria today, practically, every human endeavour encounters the reality of ethnic or religious bigotry. The devastating effects of ethnic and religious bigotry have eaten deep into the foundational structure of Nigeria as a country and contribute greatly to the country's troubled federalism and development crisis.

While many thinkers have made efforts to provide solution to the Nigerian predicament, this paper holds that enough emphasis has not been laid on the key role of rational communication in the attainment of rational understanding and consensus among the peoples of Nigeria. Thus, the paper argues that Jürgen Habermas' idea

of communicative rationality offers a rational framework through which individuals—irrespective of ethnic or religious differences—can reach understanding and consensus without resorting to violent conflicts or destructive revolution. The purpose of the paper is to invoke Habermas' communicative rationality theory to provide a theoretical guide to the much desired dialogue, tolerance, accommodation and consensus amongst peoples of Nigeria with diverse cultural and religious heritage.

Using the method of phenomenological exposition and philosophical analysis, the paper found that there is need to revive an academic conversation within the epistemic community with emphasis on the key role of rational communication towards the attainment of a peaceful coexistence of peoples in a heterogeneous country like Nigeria. Again, the paper found that there is need to promote the culture of communicative rationality amongst the peoples and various ethnic groups in Nigeria at various fora of interaction. The paper recommends that concerted efforts should be made to impact on Nigerians the need to seek desirable coexistence, development and social order through the institutionalization of rational communication, dialogue, accommodation and consensus at various institutions in the Nigerian society—in politics, economy, religion, culture, academics and so on.

ETHNO-RELIGIOUS BIGOTRY AND THE NIGERIAN PREDICAMENT

In a simple expression, one may posit that ethnic-cum-religious bigotry is a disposition in an individual or group of people which breeds hatred, suspicion and lack of support for a perceived foreigner(s). It is a disposition that breeds insecurity, agitations, tensions and socio-political instability. In her work, J.C. Nwaka notes that Nigeria is a country that gives room for easy manipulation. In some cases, in Nigeria, both ethnicity and religion become fused together such that violence resulting from such manipulation of the two is referred to as ethno-religious violence.¹ Nigeria has well over 250 ethnic/linguistic groups. One would argue that the reality of ethnic and religious bigotry is as old as Nigeria as a country; this reality manifests in various degrees of conflicts in various parts of Nigeria. The country has experienced political turmoils, which climaxed in seven military coups d'état. Many of these were generated and escalated by ethnic and religious bigotry. The Nigeria-Biafran war of 1967 to 1970 was heavily rooted in ethnic and religious bigotry, which climaxed in the pogrom unleashed upon Igbo civilians and soldiers living in the North. According to Chinua Achebe, "thirty thousand civilian men, women, and children were slaughtered, hundreds of thousands were wounded, maimed, and violated, their homes and property looted and burned; and no one asked any questions. A Sierra Leonean living in Northern Nigeria at the time wrote home in horror: The killing of the Igbos has become a state industry in Nigeria"²

Ethnic and religious bigotry and the attendant rivalry, animosity and violence have become so pervasive in Nigeria that politicians easily use it to manipulate their ways into political power and influence. One may argue that Nigeria just like many other African countries, held the idea that democracy is the total solution to all the problems facing the country; unfortunately, shortly after the return of democracy in Nigeria, the country began to witness series of eruptions in the name of religious, ethnic, communal and political violence such that it is on record that Nigeria witnessed over forty major civil disturbances in form of ethno-religious and communal clashes between 1999 and 2002. Both in the past and present, accounts abound of the reality of ethno-religious violence in many parts of Nigeria. If one draws from the account of J.C. Nwaka, one will itemize the Kaduna *Sharia* crisis of 2000 and Jos crisis of 2001 as typical examples. Accordingly, the transition to democratic rule in Nigeria was followed by a resurgence of *sharia* question in the country. Some states in northern Nigeria adopted the *sharia* legal system in the wake of the Fourth Republic. This generated tension between Christians and Muslims particularly in the north. The Christians were afraid that *sharia* would be made to apply to them too.

Although the governors of the northern states gave assurance that *sharia* would strictly be for Muslims, the Christians were afraid because the governors of the northern states who earlier agreed at the National Council of State Meeting that *sharia* would revert to penal code in due time, later denied their agreement. Again the governor of Zamfara state, Ahmed Sani, who first passed *sharia* bill into law in January 2000, also failed in his initial position that *sharia* will not apply to non-Muslims. There was a huge tension between Christians and Muslims and the Christians had a peaceful mass protest against the plan of the passage of *sharia* bill into law by the Kaduna State House of Assembly. This resulted to bloody clashes that claimed hundreds of lives on the 21st and 22nd February, 2000. As a response to this conflict in the northern part, there was a reprisal attack within the southern states of Nigeria. In May of that same year, another ethno-religious crisis occurred in Kaduna as a result of the murder of a Christian woman who was accused to have broken the *sharia* law in a Muslim dominated community.³

The Jos crisis of 2001 also was caused by ethnic and religious bigotry. Jos was considered a peaceful state, but ethno-religious bigotry precipitated violence in 2001 due to the appointment of Mallam Mohammed

¹ Jacinta Chiamaka Nwaka, "Religious Violence in New Democracy: A Study of the Kaduna and Jos Crises of 2000 and 2001", in Matthew M. Umukoro (ed.). *Ibadan Journal of Humanistic Studies* Nos. 21&22 (2011-2012), (Ibadan: Faculty of Arts, University of Ibadan, 2012), 129

² Chinua Achebe. *There was a Country: A personal History of Biafra*, (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2012), 82.

³ Jacinta Chiamaka Nwaka, 130.

Maktar, a Hausa-Fulani, as Jos North Local Government Director of Federal Government Poverty Alleviation Programme. Maktar's appointment was rejected by the native youths on many grounds including corruption, falsification of birth certificate, perjury and many others. A counter-attack from the Hausa-Fulani elders and youth followed with a petition to the Plateau State Governor, Joshua Dariye. The Hausa-Fulani printed posters and hand bills and threatened fire and brimstone. Consequently, a crisis that lasted for about six days erupted on the 7th of September, 2001. This crisis which started after the *Jumat* prayer was tagged "Dark Friday". The conflict claimed about three thousand lives. It also attracted reprisal attacks from the southern parts of Nigeria in such places as Enugu, Aba, Owerri and Onitsha.⁴

If one reckons with the publication of Salawu Blessing on the manifestation of ethnic and religious bigotry in Nigeria, it is obvious that ethnicity and religious bigotry have become a fulcrum of various forms of nationalism ranging from assertion of language, cultural autonomy and religious superiority to demands for local political autonomy and self-determination. All these sometimes lead to some forms of contextual discrimination of members of one ethnic or religious group against another on the basis of differentiated systems of socio-cultural symbols and religion. Therefore, in a multi-ethnic and religiously diverse society like Nigeria, with some forms of contextual discrimination, relationships between people may be characterized by lack of cordiality, mutual suspicion and fear as it is the case among the ethnic and religious groups in Nigeria. In fact, this mutual suspicion and lack of cordiality among the various ethnic groups explains why ethno-religious conflicts have become a permanent feature of Nigeria largely since the 1980s.⁵

Before the present democratic experiment in Nigeria, there were ethno-religious conflicts that claimed so many lives and property. Notable among such crises are the Maitatsine religious disturbances in parts of Kano and Maiduguri in the early 1980s; Jimeta-Yola religious disturbances (1984), and Zango Kataf crises in Kaduna State (1992). Others are Kafanchan College of Education Muslim-Christian riots; Kaduna Polytechnic Muslim-Christian skirmishes (1981-1982); and the cross versus the crescent conflict at the University of Ibadan (1981-1985). Yet other early ethno-religious conflicts include the Bulumkutu Christian-Muslim riots (1982); Usman Danfodio University Sokoto (1982); and the Muslim-Christian Clash during a Christian procession at Easter in Ilorin, Kwara State (1986).⁶

From the above accounts of ethno-religious conflicts, it means that for a long time ago, many parts of Nigeria have become theatres of war, characterized by an increasing number of ethnic and religious crises. The spate of ethno-religious conflict in Nigeria has however, increased with the birth of Fourth Republic. The first leg of ethnic and religious riots in Nigeria within this time was in July 1999, when some Oro cultists in Sagamu, in Ogun State accused an Hausa woman of coming out when the cultists were outside with their gnome. This led to some altercations, that snowballed into full-blown crisis. Many people, majorly of Hausa and Yoruba tribes lost their lives. The crisis was however, temporarily put in check only when a dusk to dawn curfew was imposed on the sleepy town of Sagamu. Unfortunately, however, as the crisis was put off in Sagamu, reprisal killings started in Kano, a major Hausa city. As a result, many people died and property worth billions of Naira destroyed. Kano residents of Southern extraction who had lived, all their, adult lives in the ancient city of Kano had to return to their native land to count their losses. When the crisis in Kano City was abating, Lagos erupted with another orgy of violence, visibly as a mark of vengeance of the Kano mass killing of the Yoruba tribe's men. This time, the O'dua People Congress moved against the Hausa/Fulani traders in the popular 'mile 12 market' and for two days, the area was turned to a killing field.⁷

In October, 2000, another ethno-religious conflict occurred. This was the Lagos-(Idi-Araba/Oko-Oba) Kano mayhem. The cause of this was the misunderstanding between the Hausa residents and the Yoruba in Idi-Araba in Lagos over the use of a convenience by an Hausa resident. As a result of this misunderstanding, many Yoruba residents of the area were killed with bows, arrows and machetes. Responding to this event, the O' Dua People Congress (a Yoruba militia) came into the picture and things worsened. Later, Oko-Oba, another Lagos suburb with a high population of Hausa/Fulani stock joined the fray of madness. The violence later spread to Kano and as expected the southerners were mostly the victims.

In September 2001, the ethnic tension between the Tivs and Junkuns in Plateau State reached a head after decades of fighting. The September 2001 ethnic tension was caused by what can be called a mistaken identity. What this means is that some Tivs took some nineteen soldiers to be Junkuns, however, they are fake soldiers. The Tiv youths captured them and slaughtered them one by one. The reprisal attacks by the men of the Nigerian army in Zaki Biam was devastating. Also in the same month, Jos the Plateau State capital city was hit by another conflict. The cause of this was the appointment of a Christian as a Local Council Chairman. It is interesting to

⁴ Jacinta Chiamaka Nwaka, 131.

⁵ Salawu Blessing. "Ethno-Religious Conflict in Nigeria: Causal Analysis and Proposals for new Management Strategies" in *European Journal of Social Sciences* – Volume 13, Number 3 (Published Online July, 2010). Accessed in June, 2025

⁶ Salawu Blessing....

⁷ Salawu Blessing....

note that by the time sanity found its way back to the city, more than hundred and sixty (160) lives had been lost in the mayhem.⁸

In the following month of the same year, that is October, 2001, there was another 'mayhem' in Kano. This was, however, caused by an international event when some terrorists attacked the twin towers of the World Trade Centre in the United State of America. Shortly after the United States launched an offensive against the Taliban government in Afghanistan, Kano erupted with another round of ethno-religious conflict. In this case, some Islamic fundamentalists who felt that the United States of America had no reason to bombard Afghanistan decided to set the city of Kano on fire. Like the earlier crises in the city, the Southern tribes in Nigeria were mostly the victims of the Kano ethnic religious conflict.⁹ These ethno-religious crises have precipitated a reign of insecurity and social disorder that have continued to bedevil the Nigerian society as we see in recent time in Benue, Kwara, Jos, Abuja, Lagos Kogi, Enugu and so on. Rational communication can go a long way in solving the predicament of ethnic and religious bigotry in Nigeria.

JURGEN HABERMAS' CONCEPT OF COMMUNICATIVE RATIONALITY

Jürgen Habermas, who is arguably the most influential philosopher and social thinker in contemporary time, is a German sociologist and philosopher. He was born on June 18, 1929 in Düsseldorf, Rhine Province Germany. He was born with a cleft palate and had corrective surgery twice during childhood. Habermas argues that his speech disability made him think differently about the importance of deep dependence on human capacity of communication through the speech act. The underlying reason for Habermas' theory of communicative rationality is traceable to the dominance of the modern society by instrumental reason (what could also be denoted as strategic rationality). Instrumental rationality is a form of goal-oriented calculation that is focused on achieving individual objectives perfectly, but often through the use of manipulation of others or events. It involves manipulation or coordination of actions towards the achievement of predetermined results, and in most cases, the primary goal is individualistic; it seeks to optimize individual goals and fulfillment. Habermas argues that instrumental reason can disrupt the social bonds and shared values that are essential for the background of the shared understanding of people, norms and cultural knowledge that enable social interaction among people in the society. This can erode genuine communication and solidarity in the society because the people will be more focused on strategic manipulation approach to social life—the kind of social reality that is currently experienced in Nigeria.

Given the possible harm of instrumental reason to the human society, Habermas makes a concerted effort towards the development of his theory of communicative rationality as an alternative basis towards the achievement of democratic legitimacy and consensus among people through intersubjective dialogue that incorporates an ideal speech situation. The ideal speech situation will allow individuals freedom to air their views and make rational argumentation to validate them without fear of constraint and intimidation of any kind from anybody. Within the ideal speech situation, there should not be any kind of manipulation, control or influence among the participants in the intersubjective rational communication. For Habermas, while instrumental rationality is about achieving what a particular individual wants, which usually involves the means of manipulation, control or influence of others and circumstances, communicative rationality on the other hand, is concerned with reaching mutual understanding and consensus among people through rational argumentation in a communicative action.

Habermasian concept of communicative rationality derives an explication within his critical theory of society. Habermas' critical theory is spread through his various works. However, his concept of communicative rationality with its role in human society is readily found in the volumes of his *The Theory of Communicative Action; Discourse Ethics; Knowledge and Human Interest; Theory and Practice*. Maeve Cooke considers Habermas' book (*The Theory of Communicative Action*) as "the normative core of his critical theory of society, and for the theories of morality, law and democracy that accompany this."¹⁰ Unlike Karl Marx, Habermas in his theory seeks for an evolutionary progress towards a new form of social integration. Habermas accuses Marx of missing a veritable point in his concern for the society because he failed to reckon with communicative interaction (where issues of human interest and freedom are centered) for solution in the society.

In propounding his critical theory (of society), Habermas envisions a free society and as such he concerns himself with certain issues of freedom, liberation, emancipation, and so on. Habermas holds that there is the possibility of a universal critical theory of society. And this critical theory aims to bring social order in the society by considering the individual as a subjective being with the faculty of reasoning, interest and ability of communication through language and art (symbolic expression) with the purpose of reaching a mutual understanding. Habermas holds that any critical theory of society should be able to change behaviour by

⁸ Salawu Blessing....

⁹ Salawu Blessing....

¹⁰ Maeve Cooke. "Socio-Cultural Learning as a 'Transcendental Fact': Habermas' Postmetaphysical Perspective". *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*. Vol. 9. No. 1. (February, 2001), 63.

transmitting what happens to the individual into what the individual makes happen.¹¹ Habermas contends that any critical social theory must be able to recognize that an emancipated society is one in which people are able to control their destinies through a heightened form of understanding for their social existence.¹² It means that critical theory has its interest in the emancipation of human beings from systems of domination.

Habermas holds that “rationality is understood to be a disposition of speaking and acting subjects that is expressed in modes of behaviour for which there are good reasons or grounds. This means that rational expressions admit of objective evaluation. This is true of all symbolic expressions that are, at least implicitly, connected with validity claims.”¹³ Furthermore, he holds that:

Any explicit examination of controversial validity claims requires an exacting form of communication satisfying the conditions of argumentation. Argumentation makes possible behavior that counts as rational in a specific sense, namely learning from explicit mistakes. Whereas the openness of rational expressions to criticism and to grounding merely points to the possibility of argumentation, learning processes—through which we acquire theoretical knowledge and moral insight, extend and renew our evaluative language, and overcome self-deceptions and difficulties in comprehension—themselves rely on argumentation.¹⁴

One could deduce the view that Rationality is that capability or attribute, which renders human activities and expressions meaningful and understandable. That is why Habermas holds that we can also “call a person rational if he is ready to come to an understanding and reacts to disturbances by reflecting on linguistic rules.”¹⁵ With this capability the individual is able to put forward his symbolic expression (both speech and art); and to this effect, Habermas holds that “an expression satisfies the precondition for rationality if and insofar as it embodies fallible knowledge and therewith has a relation to the objective world (that is, a relation to the facts) and is open to objective judgment.”¹⁶ For him, “a judgment can be objective if it is undertaken on the basis of a trans subjective validity claim that has the same meaning for observers and nonparticipants as it has for the acting subject himself.”¹⁷ Hence, an assertion can be called rational only if the speaker satisfies the conditions necessary to achieve the illocutionary goal of reaching an understanding about something in the world with at least one other participant in communication.¹⁸

Through this ability to understand and make reference to linguistic norms (for instance), the rational individual is able to supply rational grounding to his validity claims through the instrumentality of argumentation. This shows how important both reason and argumentation are to human activities; and for Habermas—“Likewise for business, politics, or any other field. In all these fields of human activity, reasoning and argumentation find a place as central elements within a larger human enterprise.”¹⁹ According to Habermas:

This concept of communicative rationality carries with it connotations based ultimately on the central experience of the unconstrained, unifying, consensus-bringing force of argumentative speech, in which different participants overcome their merely subjective views and, owing to the mutuality of rationally motivated conviction, assure themselves of both the unity of the objective world and the intersubjectivity of their lifeworld.²⁰

What is emerging from the above is the fact that communicative rationality manifests mostly in an intersubjective interaction (discourse) wherein subjects provide rational grounding for their various validity claims through the instrumentality of argumentation. And here, argumentation can be conceived from a perspective “as a reflective continuation with different means, of action oriented to reaching understanding.”²¹ Argumentation has the aim of producing cogent arguments that are convincing in virtue of their intrinsic properties and with which

¹¹ Jürgen Habermas, *Theory and Practice*, John Viertel (trans.), (Boston: Beacon Press, ©1971)

¹² Irele Dipo. *Introduction to Contemporary Social and Political Thinkers*. (Ibadan: New Horn in Conjunction with Critical Forum, 1993), 35.

¹³ Habermas’ *Theory of Communicative Action* is written in two volumes. McCarthy holds that this work is better read and understood as a single book. For this reason, he has presented these volumes in a single unit while retaining their Habermasian volume designation. Our reference to this work is mostly taken from McCarthy’s translation, wherein we shall henceforth, in many occasions, reference the two volumes simply as *The Theory of Communicative Action*. Habermas Jürgen. 1984, 1987. *The Theory of Communicative Action: Reason and the Rationalization of Society*. Vol. 1. *The Theory Communicative Action, Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason*. Vol. 2. McCarthy T. (trans.), (Boston: Beacon Press), 22.

¹⁴ Habermas Jürgen. *The Theory of Communicative Action*.

¹⁵ Habermas Jürgen. *The Theory of Communicative Action*. 21.

¹⁶ Habermas Jürgen. *The Theory of Communicative Action*. 9.

¹⁷ Habermas Jürgen. *The Theory of Communicative Action*.

¹⁸ Habermas Jürgen. *The Theory of Communicative Action*. 11.

¹⁹ Habermas Jürgen. *The Theory of Communicative Action*. 32.

²⁰ Habermas Jürgen. *The Theory of Communicative Action*. 10.

²¹ Habermas Jürgen. *The Theory of Communicative Action*. 25.

validity claims can be redeemed or rejected. It means that “arguments are the means by which intersubjective recognition of a proponent’s hypothetically raised validity claim can be brought about and opinion thereby transformed into knowledge.”²²

Meanwhile, the provision of grounding through argumentation means that the discursive process of reaching understanding between proponents and opponents will necessarily be normatively regulated in such a way that participants will imbibe the following—“thematize a problematic validity claim; relieved of the pressure of action and experience, in a hypothetical attitude, and test with reasons, and only with reasons, whether the claim defended by the proponents rightfully stands or not.”²³ But there must necessarily be the proper condition for participants to convey or defend their various claims. This condition is what Habermas termed the ideal speech situation. The ideal speech situation is a conducive situation; it is a primary requirement in the attainment of rational communication between individuals. This ideal speech situation requires that participants in a rational communication must be treated equally, which will allow every participant to talk and air his or her claims or interests. Participants should be open to criticism and understand each other. And when valid arguments have been used to validate any claim, then participants should be open to accept the most persuasive valid arguments. Habermas holds that a communication community will necessarily have recognizable, shared schemes of expression, which should form a background knowledge intersubjectively shared by the communication community who sees the world as objective. Accordingly, the world gains objectivity only through counting as one and the same world for a community of speaking and acting subjects. The bottom line here is that Habermas’ communicative rationality provides a theoretical guide towards the much needed dialogue, tolerance, accommodation and consensus in the human society such as the Nigerian society.

HABERMAS’ COMMUNICATIVE RATIONALITY STANDPOINT AND THE QUEST FOR DIALOGUE IN NIGERIA

From the exposition made earlier, one could, justifiably describe the Nigeria condition of today as one that is enveloped in ethnic and religious bigotry, cultural confusion, economic deprivation, social and political disorder. Given this condition therefore, the need for a dialogue through communicative rationality becomes a pertinent one. Using the instrumentality of dialogue as a means to attain desirable social order has been acknowledged by many thinkers. Following Oladipo as well as Mbembe Achille’s idea, one would say that dialogue will be an important step in rescuing Nigeria from the threats “of internal dissolution and the risks of general loss of control of both public and private violence.”²⁴ In other words, one is saying that the implementation of a rationally structured dialogue amongst Nigerian nationals would engender a desirable social order that has enabling atmosphere that is peaceful, economically and politically stable and free of tension, violence, terrorism, ethnic cum religious conflicts and war—this is the sense of social order for which one quests in Nigeria.

As a matter of clarification, what one is saying here is that it is not every kind of dialogue that may be important in the case of Nigerian situation, but the dialogue that is conducted within the province of the Habermasian communicative rationality standpoint would suffice to engender a proper development and desirable social order in Nigeria. Hence, one envisions structured dialogue or deliberation that is geared towards dousing the tension of ethnic and religious bigotry; towards reaching a rational consensus, mutual understanding and agreement among the various groups (ethnic, religious, social) that make up Nigeria as a country. Dialogue in Habermas means a rational conversation, an exchange of ideas or opinions and validity claims with the view of reaching mutual understanding, and consensus under which desirable development and social order can be evolved and maintained in the human society. Very essential to dialogue in this sense is the idea of tolerance for one another’s point of views. Irele notes that “tolerance is one of the virtues that any society should cultivate or have. It is through tolerance that different points of view are aired and judged in the grinding tribunal of public opinion. Consensus can be reached only when different beliefs, view-points, and theories are allowed to contest with each other in the public arena of grinding argumentation.”²⁵

This means, as Habermas would hold, that the question of conflict or conflicting ideas should be taken care of by the force of better argument, which is the final arbiter. It means that communicative rationality should manifests mostly in an intersubjective interaction or dialogue wherein participating subjects provide rational grounding for their various validity claims through the instrumentality of argumentation.²⁶ This kind of Habermasian dialogue, as also recognized by a Nigerian thinker, Olusegun Oladipo, should not be one of conversion or domination, which can only aggravate the differences between the participants; rather, it should be dialogue as “a reaching out”, indeed a voyage of understanding, whose destination is consensus and

²² Habermas Jürgen. *The Theory of Communicative Action*. 25.

²³ Habermas Jürgen. *The Theory of Communicative Action*. 25.

²⁴ Mbembe Achille. *On the Postcolony*. (London: University of California Press, 2001), 68.

²⁵ Irele Dipo. *In the Tracks of African Predicament: Philosophy and Contemporary Socio-Economic and Political Problems of Africa*. (Ibadan: Options Book and Information Services, 1993), 76.

²⁶ Habermas Jürgen. *The Theory of Communicative Action*. 10

togetherness.²⁷ This kind of dialogue, one believes, would lead to a sort of social evolution and reconstruction in Nigerian society; and to this effect Oladipo holds that this dialogue should address and define certain basic issues of social reconstruction, which include the following questions:

What sort of society, a competitive or cooperative society or a reasonable combination of the two? Which principles should guide social action in this society? What kind of institutions—social, economic, political, educational, and so on—are required to activate and propel the process of evolving this society? What are the rights and responsibilities of citizenship? What should be the form and substance of the structures of political power and the nature of the relationship between them?²⁸

Accordingly, creating opportunities for this kind of Habermasian structured and open-minded dialogue within the ideal speech situation on these questions above will enable the inhabitants of this country to have a thorough rethinking about the foundations of their society. It will create chances for the rational determination of the collective destiny of the people in Nigeria, while also making possible the creation of a new path to national survival, social development and ultimately desirable social order. The dividends of this kind of dialogue include:

The establishment of a national consensus as a means of building the trust required for social reconstruction; the creation of a sense of national purpose as a precondition for restoring faith in the possibility of positive change; reinvigoration of leadership, that is, providing it with a sense of direction and strengthening its capacity and willingness to confront unequivocally the major anxiety of their people in their time.²⁹

What is emerging from the view here is the fact that if one should be sincere to the reality of Nigeria's existence, there is need to go back perhaps to the drawing board through a rational dialogical deliberation of the communicative rationality typology of Jurgen Habermas. It is not enough to remark that independent Nigerian leaders (those who sought independence from colonial masters) did not get the foundation right or to point accusing finger to the drama of colonialism. Instead, there is need for Nigerians to enter into an unimpeded communicative action geared towards mutual understanding. To enter into such action would presuppose that Nigerians must have faith in dialogue as a means of consensus building. They must realize that the destiny of society is a collective one, the shaping and direction of which is also a collective responsibility; as such they must have respect for humanity and the forms of life of the parties constituting the community of discourse.³⁰ Of course, as Habermasian standpoint tells us, participants must give grounding (reason) for their various claims and be open to criticism through which a reasoned transcending or universal agreement could be reached.

CONCLUSION

While Habermas' theory envisions rational understanding, agreement, consensus among people of diverse cultural and religious background, emancipation and ultimately the attainment of a desirable social order in the society, the obvious reality in Nigeria is the case of misunderstanding, disagreement, lack of consensus, antagonistic relationship among peoples of Nigeria, as manifested in ethnic cum religious bigotry. The recommendation here is that Habermas' theory should be institutionalized in various facets of Nigeria system as a country—cultural sphere, religious sphere, political sphere, economic sphere, industrial sphere, academic system, and so on.

Thus, in politics, accruing from the Habermas theory, is the recommendation that there should be a "continuous" rational communication, conversation among the various tribes in Nigeria. A situation where the various tribes will enter into a rational communication to bring to fore their various political interest, of course, within the ideal speech situation where the final arbiter is the force of a rational argumentation. Political interest of—sovereignty, autonomy, power, freedom, control, boundary and so on, will be laid bare and pushed to the position of acceptability by the force of a rational argumentation. In economy, this system would allow various ethnic groups to bring to fore, their economic interest through a rational argumentation. Arguably, economic resources provide the major basic needs of a people. When these needs are not met or denied, there is bound to be chaos and social disorder.

In culture, Habermas' rational communicative theory can be used to engineer cultural conversation among various ethnic groups in Nigeria. There is need to enter into a rational communication, a conversation in cultural interest. Arguably, nations are built under the foundations of human cultures; and the culture of a people is built upon certain philosophies of existence and of norms created from values attached to human dignity, to human worth, to human relationship, to existence, to life, to purpose of life and so on. In religion, the Habermasian theory can bear its fruits in so many ways. It can take the tone of a religious dialogue—a dialogue that depends on mutual trust; that demands respect for the identity and integrity of the other self and requires a willingness to

²⁷ Olusegun Oladipo. *Philosophy and Social Reconstruction in Africa*. (Ibadan: Hope Publications Ltd. 2009) 60.

²⁸ Olusegun Oladipo. *Philosophy and Social Reconstruction in Africa*. 59.

²⁹ Olusegun Oladipo. *Philosophy and Social Reconstruction in Africa*. 59.

³⁰ Olusegun Oladipo. *Philosophy and Social Reconstruction in Africa*. 60.

question one's own self-understanding as well as an openness to understand others on their own religious terms. A concerted effort must be made to inculcate the rudiments of Habermas' communicative rationality into the academic curriculum. The bottom line is the effort to bring the Nigerian students to the knowledge of the importance of rational communication among the citizens towards the quest for a rational understanding.

What has emerged from the Habermas' communicative rationality standpoint is the fact that there should be a dialogical system wherein participants can rationally come to a consensus. This system is verily needed in a conflict ridden Nigerian society to quell the menace of ethnic and religious bigotry—a situation that has maximally generated hatred, suspicion, lack of trust, insecurity, violent agitations, tensions and socio-political instability among the peoples of Nigeria. The Habermasian standpoint would engender governmental (state) legitimacy—wherein the citizens would have genuine reason not to alienate themselves from the government but to cooperate with the social norms and government of the day, knowing full well of their stake in the matter, of their agreement and consensus through their communicative action with the other-selves. The Habermasian standpoint would also engender development by intersubjective cooperation and coordination. This will necessarily entail attitudinal dispositions as understanding, agreement, ethnic and religious tolerance and trust among subjects in a communication community. But if one should identify the lack of these dispositions among Nigerians (as currently experienced), then it means that there is lack of communicative rationality. This is why a persistent call for a rational dialogue in Nigerian's socio-political milieu is very important in the quest to douse the tensions of ethnic and religious bigotry towards the quest for development and a desirable social order.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Achebe Chinua. *There was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra*. London: Penguin Books Ltd 2012.
- Achille M. *On the Postcolony*. London: University of California Press. 2001
- Ajayi S. Ademola. *African Culture & Civilization*. Ibadan: Atlantis Books. 2005.
- Dipo Irele. *In the Tracks of African Predicament: Philosophy and Contemporary Socio Economic and Political Problems of Africa*. Ibadan: Options Book and Information Service. 1993.
- Frank K. L. 'What is Social Order?' *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 49. No.5. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2770484>. Retrieved on June 19, 2024.
- Habermas J. *Knowledge and Human Interest*. Boston: Beacon Press. ©1971.
- , *Communication and the Evolution of Society*. Boston: Bacon Press. 1979.
- , *The Theory of Communicative Action: Reason and the Rationalization of Society* Vol. 1. McCarthy T. Trans. Boston: Beacon Press. 1984.
- , *The Theory of Communicative Action: Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason*, Vol. 2. McCarthy T. Trans. Boston: Beacon Press. 1987.
- , *Discourse Ethics: Notes on Philosophical Justification in Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*. Cambridge: MIT Press. 1990.
- Han G. *An Educational Interpretation of Jurgen Habermas's Communicative Rationality*. *Asia Pacific Education Review* Vol.3. No.2. 2002.
- Hollis M. and Lukes S. (eds.), *Rationality and Relativism*. Oxford: Basis Blackwell. 1983.
- Holquist M. (ed.), *Dialogic Imagination*. Texas: Texas University Press. 1981.
- Honderich T. (ed.), *Essays on Freedom of Action*. London & Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul. 1973.
- Irele D. *In the Tracks of African Predicament: Philosophy and Contemporary Socio Economic and Political Problems of Africa*. Ibadan: Options Book and Information Services. 1993.
- , *Alienation and the Problem of Loyalty in Africa*. Ibadan: Options Book and Information service. 1993.
- Jon E. (ed.) *Deliberative Democracy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1998.
- King P., *Toleration*. London: George Allen & Unwin. 1976.
- Lawhead F. William. *The Philosophical Journey: An Interactive Approach* (2nd ed.). New York: McGraw Hill. 2003.
- Maeve Cooke. "Socio-Cultural Learning as a 'Transcendental Fact': Habermas' Post-metaphysical Perspective". *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*. Vol. 9. No. 1. February, 2001.
- MaCarthy T., *The Critical Theory of Jurgen Habermas*. London: Hutchinson Press. 1978.
- Matthew M. Umukoro (ed.), *Ibadan Journal of Humanistic Studies* Nos. 21&22. 2011-2012.
- Moore B.N. and Bruder K. (eds.), *Philosophy: The Power of Ideas*, Eighth Edition. New York: McGraw-Hill Companies Inc. © 2011.
- Nozick R. *The Nature of Rationality*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press. 1993.
- Nwaka J. Chiamaka, "Religious Violence in New Democracy: A Study of the Kaduna and Jos Crises of 2000 and 2001", in Matthew M. Umukoro (ed.). *Ibadan Journal of Humanistic Studies* Nos. 21&22 (2011-2012), Ibadan: Faculty of Arts, University of Ibadan. 2012.
- Oladipo Olusegun. *Philosophy and Social Reconstruction in Africa*. Ibadan: Hope Publications Ltd. 2009.
- Olu-Owolabi K. (ed.), *Issues and Problems in Philosophy*. Ibadan: Grovacs Network. 2000.
- Onimode B., *Africa in the World of the 21st Century*. Ibadan: Ibadan University Press. 2000.

- Onuoha J.I. & Okpoko P.U. (eds.), *Ethnic Nationalism and Democratic Consolidation: Perspectives from Nigeria and the United States of America*. Nsukka: Great AP Express Publishers Ltd, 2004.
- Onwuegbusi M.O. (ed. et al.), *Journal of Philosophy and Development* Vol. 11. Nos. 1&2. Nigeria: Department of Philosophy Olabisi Onabanjo University Ago-Iwoye. 2009/2010.
- Osaghae, Eghosa. *Structural Adjustment and Ethnicity in Nigeria*. Uppsala: Nordic African Institute. 1995.
- Oshitelu G.A., *Reason and Belief: Issues in Contemporary Godlessness*, Ibadan: Hope Publication. 2002.
- Oyeshile O.A. *Reconciling the Self with the Other: An Existentialist Perspective on the Management of Ethnic Conflicts in Africa*. Ibadan: Hope Publications. 2005.
- Putnam H., *Reason, Truth and History*. UK: Cambridge University Press. 1981.
- Salawu Blessing. "Ethno-Religious Conflict in Nigeria: Causal Analysis and Proposals for new Management Strategies" in *European Journal of Social Sciences* – Volume 13, Number 3 (Published Online July, 2010). Accessed in June. 2025
- Sowaribi Tolofari. *Exploitation and Instability in Nigeria: The Orkar Coup in Perspective*. Lagos: Press Alliance Network Limited. 2004.
- Udom & Okolie, "Ethno-Religious Conflicts in Nigeria: A Threat to the Quest for National Integration". *The Indonesian Journal of International Clinical Legal Education*. 2022.
<https://journal.unnes.ac.id/sju/index.php/iccle>

Other Internet Sources

- Owete Festus, "Between Jonathan's National Conference and Obasanjo's National Political Reform Conference: What You need to Know", February 16, 2014, Premiumtimesng.com
- National Political Reform Conference:
<https://constitutionnet.org/sites/default/files/nationalpoliticalreformconference.pdf>